

OUR SECRET SOCIETY

W DINGWALL FORDYCE



National Schools, Wrexham.

GIRLS' DEPARTMENT.

Motto:

"GWELL DYSG NA GOLUD."

"GAIR DUW GOREU DYSG."



PRIZE

AWARDED TO

Rose Hamblett

STANDARD 2. a.

FOR

Highest Exam. Marks.

Miss ROBERTS,

Head Mistress.

Date July 19 11.

By W. DINGWALL FORDYCE

Our Secret Society

THOMAS NELSON
AND SONS



LONDON, EDINBURGH
DUBLIN, AND
NEW YORK



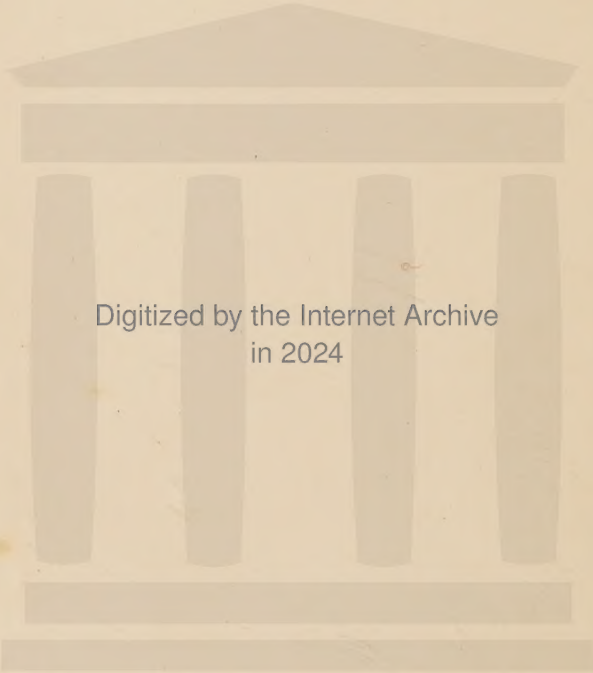
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OUR SECRET SOCIETY.

CHAPTER I.

HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS.

“**H**ERE we are! Hurrah! There’s Nora with Donald,” and uttering a wild shout, Frank Naismith opened the door and flung himself on to the platform before the train had stopped. Knowing that he was well able to look after himself, I turned to collect our various bundles; but our fellow-passenger, an old woman, shrieked as he alighted on all fours.

“Oh,” she panted, holding her ample bosom, “the young rascal! To give a poor body such a fright, which if he had been killed would only have served him right.”

By this time I had deposited most of our belongings on the platform, and was vainly groping under the seat for our cricket bats.

‘Now you,’ continued the old woman, scowling at

me and drawing her skirts together, "just stop it. I know your tricks and pranks. Like enough you'll be sticking pins into my legs or setting alight one of these horrid crackers under the seat."

"If you would move your feet a little—" I began; but she caught me up at once.

"Move! you impudent young baggage. I've paid for my seat, and here I sit as long as I like."

The engine whistled, and Frank shouted, "Hurry up!"

"Oh, please," I said desperately, with my head half under the seat, "let me get the bats."

"Rats!" shrieked the old dame, and with one bound she was on to the opposite seat. A last vigorous dive, and as the carriage jerked forward I seized the missing bats and pulled them out.

"Rats! and me sitting there comfortable like, and not knowing they was under me. Oh, the young rascals—" But the train sped on, and the rest was lost. Picking up as many bundles as possible, I made my way to the exit.

"Ticket, please," said the porter at the gate; and dropping everything again, I began to fumble in my pockets.

"Come on," shouted Frank, rushing up. "I've

arranged about the bikes ; what's keeping you ? Oh, your ticket.—Never mind his ticket, Carter ; it's all right."

"Sorry, sir," said the man, touching his cap, "but all tickets have to be collected."

"Buck up then, Humphrey, and find the beastly thing. Donald's getting restless. I'll pitch these things in."

My ticket seemed to have vanished. Carter grew angry as pocket after pocket was searched in vain. At last it flashed across me that I had put it in my pocket-book for safety. I hauled it out from my inside coat, scattering several pieces of paper at the same time. Yes, there was the ticket, and greatly relieved I handed it over.

"Thank you, sir," said the porter ; "you dropped these."

"Thanks," I said, stuffing the papers he held out into my pocket as I ran outside. Donald evidently was a little restless. He was playfully standing on his hind legs as I tumbled into the governess cart, and next instant he was off like an arrow.

"Hurrah !" yelled Frank again, as we tore along with the open door of the cart flapping and banging behind.

"Shut the door, Frank," said Nora Naismith quietly; "the noise will frighten him and make him bolt."

"Let him bolt, then; I don't mind."

Reaching over, I managed to shut the door, and as we began to climb a long hill, the pony settled down into a steady trot.

"Isn't this jolly after grinding away at lessons! Has Miss Lister gone yet, Nora? I say," went on Frank, "I forgot to introduce you two. This is Humphrey Verney, Nora; you know he is my chum at Brotherton."

I took off my cap in a shamefaced manner, for girls were new to me.

"Yes; I've heard of you," said Nora, nodding to me. "You taught Frank to use these horrid catapults, and he came home and killed one of my chickens."

"Oh, I say," said Frank, reddening, while I sat too surprised to defend myself, "that's not fair; and besides, you know I saved up and paid for your wretched chicken."

"Yes; and then borrowed money from me to buy more bullets afterwards. But I don't suppose Humphrey is worse than you or any other boy."

"No, I'm not really bad a bit," I began, when Donald shied suddenly.

"It's only the colonel's Chinaman, Chew Win Kee," said Nora, as she recovered her balance. "Donald always shies at him.—Behave," she added to the pony, giving him a flick with the whip.

The Chinaman stood respectfully at the side of the road as we passed. He was very tall for a Celestial, and his eyes were almost squarely set in his face like a European's. He was dressed in an ordinary tweed suit, with rather wide trousers, and soft felt hat.

"Goodee night, Win Kee," shouted Frank, who prided himself on what he called his "pigeon English." "You been uppee to town? Holidays now; we comee see colonel."

"Welly good," said Win Kee, smiling and bowing.

"Ugh! I can't stand him," said Nora, shuddering. "I wonder you speak to him, Frank."

"He's a jolly chap," replied her brother. "He can make all sorts of keys and things out of bits of wire. You should just see him. I wonder what he was doing to-day. He came down in our train."

"I didn't see him."

"No; he left the station while you were hauling

out our things. But I say, old chap, you should know all about Chinamen. Weren't you born somewhere out there?"

"Born in China!" cried Nora. "Then you're a Chinaman too."

"No, I'm not," I declared stoutly. "I was born in Singapore, and it belongs to England, and so I'm an Englishman."

"All the same thing," said Frank, whose ideas of geography were very vague. "These places are all together somewhere out East. But you know Chinese or Hindustanee, or some language like that, don't you? Win Kee has been in Singapore too, so you'll be able to speak to him."

"I only remember a few words of Malay now," I said modestly.

We had now come to the top of the long hill, some two miles from Peddlington station. Before us the road stretched for another mile, sloping gently down to Peddlington village. As we bowled along we left the cultivated fields behind, and drove through sandy heathlands. Shortly before the village was entered a cross road turned abruptly inland.

"That leads to Fareham Castle," said Nora, pointing with her whip. "Look! you can just see the

turrets sticking up out of that wood. It is said to be haunted."

"Only girls believe that rubbish," said Frank scoffingly. "I've been over the castle heaps of times, and never seen anything."

"But that was in the day-time," Nora objected. "Ghosts always appear at night, and"—here she lowered her voice to a mysterious whisper—"Peter told me last week that he had seen ghosts himself."

Even Frank seemed impressed with this announcement.

"Who's Peter?" I asked.

"The gatekeeper. He lives in the lodge at the end of the avenue, and looks after the castle," Frank explained. "An awfully jolly old chap. There's the sea!" he broke off, as we clattered into the village.

Away at the end of the straggling street—the one street Peddlington boasted—the sunny blue ocean seemed to bid us welcome, and sent a fresh cool breeze to fan our faces. Men were smoking and lounging about after the day's work, women were knitting and gossiping, while the children shouted and romped. Nora and Frank were evidently well known and liked, for many were the greetings that passed between them and the villagers.

"Eh, there's young master doctor," cried one; "Glad to see you back again, Master Frank," called another; while my chum shouted inquiries as to Tom, Dick, and Harry. Turning sharply to the right just before the street lost itself in the loose sand of the foreshore, Nora set Donald at a steep hill, up which he raced in gallant style.

"That's our home, Ivy Cottage," said Nora, as we got to the top, nodding towards an ivy-covered house a short distance ahead.

"Home at last; hurrah!" shouted Frank. "There's mother!" and he waved his straw hat wildly.

Donald needed no whip to remind him that he was near home, and in a few minutes we had swung up the little avenue and under the porch.

"Welcome home," said Mrs. Naismith, coming forward and receiving a violent embrace from Frank.

"This is Humphrey, mother," he said, next moment dragging me out of the governess cart.

"We were so glad to hear you were coming, Humphrey," said Mrs. Naismith, shaking hands; "and I hope you will feel quite at home amongst us and enjoy your holidays.—Now, children, come away in to tea, all of you; I am sure you must be hungry."

We trooped into the house after her, while a little stable boy led Donald round to his stable.

"Is father out?" asked Frank, as we sat down to the table.

"Yes," replied his mother, pouring out the tea; "he told me not to wait for him, as he might be late. He was called out to a patient some distance away. And how have you got on at school this term?"

"Not so bad," admitted Frank complacently. "I won the hundred yards at the races, and made twenty-six against Grangetown Academy, and—"

"Capital!" said Mrs. Naismith, laughing. "But what about your lessons? Were you well up in your classes?"

Frank's face fell a little, and he hesitated, for truth to say he did not shine in lessons as he did at games.

"Indeed he was top in English, and got the first prize," I said, seeing his embarrassment.

"O Frank, I am so glad," exclaimed his mother, and Frank gave me a friendly kick under the table by way of acknowledgment. Owing to a series of accidents most of the top boys in the English class had left before the end of the term, and my chum

had most unexpectedly found himself the proud possessor of his first prize.

“ I’m not so good in the other classes, mother ; but I really am working.” The working fit had come on late in the session and passed rapidly, but still it was a beginning.

“ I am very pleased to hear it, Frank,” said Mrs. Naismith. “ Remember in another year or two you will be going to one of the big public schools, and will have to work hard.”

“ Yes, mother, I will,” replied Frank earnestly. “ I’ll work till I burst.”

“ Oh, I don’t ask that,” she said, laughing ; “ but now it is holiday time for you all. Miss Lister went away this morning, and Nora’s holidays begin to-morrow too. What would you like to do ? ”

“ Hurrah ! Nora, that is jolly,” cried Frank ; “ we’ll have a ripping time. Let’s go down to the rocks and fish in the morning. We have to go down for our bikes in the evening, as we left them at the station so as to drive up with Nora.”

“ Well, you can do as you like, so long as you don’t get into mischief. Now, if you have quite finished tea, you might show Humphrey round the garden, and then it will be time for bed.”

So we visited Donald, inspected Nora's chickens and rabbits, fed the pigeons, and picked some gooseberries. What with the long journey and the strong sea air I was beginning to feel very sleepy, when Mrs. Naismith called to us from the house. A tall, bearded man was standing beside her in the porch, and Frank greeted him with a shout of welcome and flung himself into his arms.

"Gently, gently," laughed Dr. Naismith, disengaging himself; "you're getting too heavy for me nowadays. But I'm very glad to have you home again.—And you, too, Humphrey; we must see that you have a good time."

"Your boxes have come, boys," announced Mrs. Naismith, "and I am sure you are ready for bed.—Be sure to put on your flannels or any old suit to-morrow, Humphrey. The children always wear their old clothes for holiday romps.—And now good-night, and sound sleep to you all."

"Good-night!" we chorussed.

Frank and I slept in the same room, and having tumbled out our night-things from our trunks, we jumped into bed, and were soon fast asleep.

Somewhere about the early hours of the morning I was awakened by the booming of the sea. A

cuckoo clock struck four, and the first pale light of the summer morning crept through the blinds and invited me to the window. As I peeped out a dark form crossed the lawn, and approached the house as if searching for something. For a few minutes I watched it in sleepy bewilderment; then, as it turned and stole noiselessly away, in the dim light of the breaking day I seemed to recognize the face of the colonel's Chinaman, Chew Win Kee!

CHAPTER II.

A MIDNIGHT VISITOR.

THE bell had rung several times before Frank and I put in an appearance at breakfast next morning.

"Lazybones!" said Nora when we did appear at last. "We're nearly finished, and you've lost a lot of time on our first holiday."

Dr. Naismith laughed. "Plenty of time before you, miss," he said, "and the boys must have a little allowance their first morning.—Got to be up pretty sharp at Brotherton, Humphrey, eh?"

"Yes, 7.30 sharp and breakfast at 8; any one who is late gets lines."

"How horrid!" said Nora.

"You see what you have escaped by being a girl," said Dr. Naismith gravely. "The trials boys have to endure are terrible. Remember that when next you wish you had been a boy."

"Never mind his teasing, Nora," said Mrs. Naismith. "When I was your age I longed to be a boy too."

"Oh, did you, mother? And don't you wish it still?"

"Well, no; one's views change with the years," replied Mrs. Naismith, smiling.—"But, dear me, Frank, is that your fourth slice of toast?"

"Yes, mother; I'm awfully hungry."

"I am glad your work has not interfered with your appetite, Frank," said his father, with a sly look at Nora.—"Now, my dear," to his wife, "if you'll excuse me I'll be off."

"Well, I'll come to the gate and see you start," said Mrs. Naismith, rising.—"You can take my place at the head of the table, Nora."

"Frank," said Nora, when she had poured me out another cup of tea and spilt most of it on the tablecloth—"Frank, what *were* you doing last night?"

"Sleeping."

"No, but really. I won't tell."

Frank paused with a large slice of bread and jam halfway to his mouth.

"Won't tell who?" he asked, staring, and regardless of grammar. "What are you driving at?"

"Was it really not you? Then it must have been Humphrey," said Nora, turning in triumph to me. It was my turn to stare now.

"What was me?" I asked, rather mixed.

"I don't know what you were doing, but I heard you moving about in the study, and then I heard you outside."

"But I wasn't up!" I gasped. "I slept like a top all night, and only woke—" "In time for breakfast" was on my lips, but suddenly the memory of my first awakening flashed across my mind.

"Well?" asked Nora as I paused, her gray eyes bright with curiosity, while Frank stared at us open-mouthed.

"When did you hear me moving about?" I asked, replying to her question with another.

"Oh, I didn't look; but it must have been the middle of the night, because it was dark."

"Then it wasn't me you heard, because I did not wake till very early—just about four."

"Then you *were* up!" said Frank in amazement.

"Yes, at least for a few minutes. I went to the window to look out—"

"And you saw somebody," cried Nora—"you saw something!"

"Yes, I saw somebody come across the lawn towards the house and then go back again."

"Who was it?" asked Frank.

"I *think* it was Chew Win Kee," I said, not feeling so confident now that, in broad daylight, I tried to recollect the scene.

"There! I knew it! Didn't I tell you he was a wretch?" cried Nora triumphantly.

"Who is a wretch?" asked Mrs. Naismith, entering the room.

"The colonel's Chinaman, Win Kee. I heard him moving about in the study last night, and Humphrey saw him sneaking away," said Nora, all in a breath.

"No, no; I didn't say that," I protested.

"Do you mean to say you really heard some one in the house last night, Nora?" asked her mother.

"Well, I heard *something* moving in the study, mother."

"And you saw the Chinaman going away from the house, Humphrey?"

"No, he came towards the house from the road and went back again, but I am not at all certain that it was Win Kee. Besides, it was long after Nora heard the noise."

"I wonder what he wanted, whoever he was," said

Mrs. Naismith. "After all, there is no reason to suppose he had been in the house; but we can look into the study and see if there are any signs of an intruder. Come along."

We all trooped after her. The drawing-room was on the opposite side of the hall from the dining-room, and the study was beyond it again, facing the passage leading to the kitchen. As Mrs. Naismith turned the handle and entered the room a thrill of expectation went through us all. But the room seemed just as usual, with no signs of having been entered. After a hasty look round, Mrs. Naismith rang the bell.

"Was the window shut this morning when you drew up the blind, Jane?" she asked the servant who appeared.

"Yes, ma'am."

"You always see that all the windows on the ground floor are shut and fastened before you go to bed?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Thanks, Jane; I just wished to make sure." And Jane withdrew.

Mrs. Naismith then went carefully over the room, and we assisted her. She examined the sill for marks of mud or boots, but found none. Frank,

who was a great admirer and follower of Sherlock Holmes, went down on his knees and crawled about the floor for "clues ;" Nora counted the ornaments on the mantelpiece, the books in the bookcase, and even the pictures on the wall ; while I turned my attention to Dr. Naismith's writing desk. Everything seemed in good order ; and the drawers were all locked, though the key was in the top left-hand drawer. Mrs. Naismith came over as I was trying them.

"The drawers seem all right," I said.

"I am very glad to hear it," she said ; "I remember now that my husband told me that he had drawn some money the other day and put it in his desk. We shall soon see if it has been touched."

We stood round while she unlocked the drawers one after another, and a bundle of bank notes was discovered in the second top drawer on the right side. Mrs. Naismith counted them. "Four fives and one ten," she said with a sigh of relief ; "that is all right."

"Then there hasn't been any burglar after all," exclaimed Frank, in a disappointed tone ; "Nora must have been dreaming."

"Indeed I wasn't," said Nora. "I *did* hear something move, but perhaps it was a—"

"A rat," I suggested.

Mrs. Naismith smiled. "Whatever it was I don't think it was a burglar, or Bouncer would have barked, and these notes would certainly have disappeared. Don't you think so too, dear?" she asked, drawing Nora to her.

"Yes, mother," said Nora, hugging her.

"Well, now, run along, you two, and look out your fishing rods; enough of the morning has been wasted already. Humphrey will help me to tidy up the desk."

"Come on, Nora," said Frank; "we'll have the tackle ready in two ticks, long before Humphrey is ready."

"Now, Humphrey," said Mrs. Naismith when they had left the room, "I have something to tell you. Frank is too shy."

I wondered what it could possibly be that made Frank shy, and Mrs. Naismith seemed to guess my thoughts.

"He is not usually backward in that way," she said, smiling, "but he preferred that I should speak to you about this. You have no doubt always heard him speak of Nora as his sister, and we all regard her and treat her as such; but she came to us in a strange

way some years ago, and we adopted her." She paused, and went on softly. "Two years after Frank was born I had a little baby, a girl, who only lived a few weeks. I felt her loss very keenly, and so did my husband. Shortly after her death we had a most unusually severe storm here, and the next morning a little girl was washed ashore, lashed to a spar, just a mile or two up the coast. My husband was passing at the time, and carried her here and revived the faint spark of life that was flickering out. Several bodies were washed ashore, but no clue was found to lead to the identification of the vessel which had foundered, and indeed so many were missing after that disastrous gale that it would have been impossible to say for certain to which vessel they each belonged. Our baby's clothes bore no name, though a cross was marked on each thing. A piece of paper had evidently been pinned to the clothes, but only a fragment remained, and the pencil writing had been hopelessly blurred by the sea water. We made every inquiry, but no relatives were discovered, and so we adopted the baby in the place of our own little one and called her Nora. We judged that she would be only a few months old when she came ashore, and that is eleven years ago next month. She

has become so much one of the family that we are apt to forget that she may yet be claimed by her relatives. Nora herself is rather sensitive on the subject, poor girl, though she is perfectly happy with us. And so I wished to tell you myself rather than let you hear about it from the people round about, who, of course, all know."

Frank's voice was heard shouting, and I turned to go.

"Off with you now and have a good time," said Mrs. Naismith, rising. "I am sure you will take care not to hurt Nora's feelings about this in any way."

"Rather," I said, fumbling with the door handle. "It's awfully hard luck on her—at least I don't mean that, but about her not knowing about her people; and I'm awfully sorry about the—the baby, you know," I blurted, awkwardly enough; but Mrs. Naismith stooped suddenly and kissed me.

CHAPTER III.

THE COLONEL'S STORY.

“**W**HAT a time you’ve been!” said Frank; then in a lower tone, “Did the mater speak to you about Nora?”

I nodded, and he seemed much relieved. We joined Nora under the porch, and a rod and basket were handed over to me.

“The quickest way is past Colonel Leighton’s house,” said Nora. “Shall we have a race to the stile? I believe I could beat you now, Frank.”

“Come on then; you’ll soon see! One, two, three, away!” and they were off, while I followed as fast as I could. The colonel’s house stood some two hundred yards up the road, and fifty yards beyond it I found Nora sitting on a stile jeering at Frank, who seemed thoroughly crestfallen.

“I won!” she cried; “I told you I would.”

“It’s this beastly basket,” growled Frank. “No-

body could run with a great thing like this bumping against them."

"I've got one too," retorted Nora. "Were you really running your fastest, Humphrey?" she asked, turning to me.

"Really and truly," I said. "I am not a fast runner, and you beat me hollow."

"You just try him at a mile," said Frank. "You think you can beat anybody."

"I don't want to run a mile, and anyway I beat you," scoffed his sister.

"What a jolly old house the colonel has!" I observed, trying to turn the conversation and smooth matters over.

"Isn't it?" said Frank. "It's ever so old, and has funny little turrets and passages. There must be a lot of rats about it too. Just look how thick the ivy is!"

"It is a dear old house," said Nora, "but I wouldn't like to spend a night in it alone. It looks as if it might be haunted," and she shuddered.

"You're always thinking of ghosts. You'll be getting frightened of Colonel Leighton next. You know he's a little touched here!" said Frank, tapping his forehead significantly.

"Oh no," cried Nora. "I am very fond of the colonel, and he likes me; but I can't bear Win Kee."

"What is wrong with Colonel Leighton?" I asked.

"Lost his memory," said Frank. "But come on, and I'll tell you about it when we get down to the rocks. We've wasted too much time already."

We crossed the stile, and following the path through the heath reached the edge of the cliff, where a narrow path led zigzag down to the rocks some two hundred feet below. Down this path Nora and Frank scampered at what seemed to me break-neck speed, while I followed slowly in the rear.

"You'll soon get used to it," they assured me, and indeed in a few days the descent seemed quite easy. When we had gathered some mussels for bait and were all seated on the rocks with our floats bobbing in front of us, I reminded Frank of his promise about Colonel Leighton.

"We don't really know much about him," began my chum. "He came to Cliffden—that's his house—about five years ago with his Chinaman, and has stayed there ever since. A doctor in London wrote father about him, explaining what was wrong and asking dad to take charge of him. Hullo! there's a bite. I've got him. A whopper." Frank landed

his silvery victim, baited and threw out his hook again, then proceeded with his tale.

"Colonel Leighton was at Singapore with his regiment at the time of the Boxer outrages in China, and they were sent out as part of the British force. At the relief of Pekin he was struck on the head by a stone dropped from the wall, and has never quite recovered. His memory is quite gone, and he is like a child in some things. Father says there is little chance of his memory ever being properly restored, unless some violent shock restores it."

"Has he no relations?"

"Lord Gresham, who owns Fareham Castle, is a far-off cousin or something, but they quarrelled over his marriage. Both of them wanted to marry the same lady, and she liked the colonel best. Anyhow they never spoke to each other after that. Mrs. Leighton and her baby were drowned in the great storm some years ago when they were returning to England. They were washed ashore on the sands several miles further up the coast."

"Yes; wasn't it terribly sad?" said Nora. "The mother was clasping the poor little baby in her arms. It might have been me," she continued, gazing dreamily out to sea.

"Where did you come ashore?" I asked rather timidly, wishing to let her know I had heard the story, and yet afraid she might resent it.

"Oh, did mother tell you about that?" she asked, colouring. "Do you see that point sticking out over there—not the first but the second? It was there I was found washed up on the rocks. Isn't it dreadful that no one knows who I really am?"

"We always go there for a picnic on Nora's birthday," said Frank. "We'll be going there on the eleventh of next month. It's a ripping place for paddling and fishing.—Look out, Nora; you've got one! Pull him in."

Nora obeyed in great haste, and landed a beauty. The fish were now biting in earnest, and our attention was fully taken up with our floats. In the midst of the excitement we heard a loud barking up on the cliffs.

"There's Bouncer," exclaimed Nora. "Why doesn't he come down?—Boun-cer!"

Looking up we saw the young retriever that the colonel had given Nora, tearing about the edge of the cliff and barking in great excitement.

"Mother must have sent him to let us know it is time to go home," remarked Frank. "But what on

earth is he up to? Why doesn't he come down? Boun-cer!"

The dog looked for a moment as if he were going to jump over, and Nora gave a cry, but next instant with a short bark he resumed his curious gambols.

"I'll go up and find out what he's after if you two will bring my basket and rod," said Frank, and away he went scrambling up the path, while we wound up the fishing tackle and followed more slowly with our catch. On reaching the top we found Frank lying on the ground watching the retriever, who was sniffing about as though in chase of something. He ran up to Nora with a whine of recognition, and then immediately resumed his hunting.

"I can't make out what the beggar is after," said Frank, in a puzzled tone. "At first I thought it must be a rabbit, but between us we've searched every tuft of grass for fifteen yards on both sides of the path, and no rabbit could have gone over the edge. Yet Bouncer seems to think so; look, there he is trying to get down again."

Sure enough the dog was scraping with his paws at the edge of the cliff, and whimpering with excitement as though he had run his quarry to earth.

Frank and Nora peered over, and somewhat timidly I followed their example.

"There is absolutely nothing to be seen," said Frank, after a pause; "it's almost sheer down just here. Perhaps there is a ledge below that rock sticking out, but no animal could possibly reach it."

"He must be wanting a game with us," said Nora, rising to her feet. "But it is time we went home to lunch. I'll tie my handkerchief to Bouncer's collar and lead him.—Come here, sir!"

I sat up and sniffed the air. Frank burst out laughing. "What's up now, Humphrey? Surely you're not going to follow Bouncer's game next?"

"Hardly; but I say, don't you smell tobacco?"

It was Frank's turn to sniff now.

"I do," he admitted; "but what about it? Probably some one smoking on the rocks below."

"But that's a long way off."

"It is rather, but it's the most likely place, all the same. It travels a long way on this fresh sea air, you know."

"I suppose so, but still—"

"Well, where else can it possibly come from?" asked Frank impatiently, as he rose to his feet. "There isn't a soul within sight up here."

"No, but perhaps some one is coming up the path."

"We'll call and see. Hullo—o!"

The shout went echoing along the cliffs and out to sea, but there was no reply.

"There!" said Frank triumphantly; "you see there is no one on the path."

"But there doesn't seem to be any one on the rocks either," persisted Nora.

"Oh, perhaps they didn't hear us or couldn't be bothered answering," was the illogical response. "Now, then, let's see who caught most fish. I've fourteen."

"Twelve," said Nora.

"Only nine," I counted, turning out my basket.

"Jolly good for the first time," said Frank patronizingly. "Mother will be glad to get such a splendid basketful. Come on; I'm ravenous."

"Frank, does Dr. Naismith smoke?" I asked as we resumed our homeward journey.

"No, he doesn't. But why do you ask? You surely don't think he had anything to do with the mysterious smell of tobacco just now?"

"Oh no. Only I noticed a half-burnt wax vesta in the study grate this morning."

"Been Jane lighting the lamp last night," he replied carelessly.

"Jane always uses safety matches," observed Nora, hauling along the reluctant Bouncer.

We found Mrs. Naismith waiting for us at the gate. "Come away, children," she called; "lunch is ready. I sent Bouncer to let you know.—Why are you leading him like that, Nora dear?"

"We couldn't get him away from the cliff, mother."

A few minutes later we were seated round the table, and Frank proceeded to give an account of the morning's doings.

"You certainly have caught a splendid lot of fish," said his mother when he had finished, "and they will be delicious fried for breakfast to-morrow; but I am rather concerned about Bouncer. He seems to have behaved very oddly, and this morning he did not seem at all well when I let him off the chain. I hope he is not going mad. I must speak to your father about him."

"Poor Bouncer!" said Nora; "I do hope there is nothing wrong with him. May I try him with some water, mother? If he is going mad he won't touch it."

With Mrs. Naismith's permission she poured some

water into a saucer, and Bouncer lapped it up greedily, wagging his tail as if to say, "Now that's what I call good!" Much relieved, we finished lunch in better spirits, and fell to discussing plans for the afternoon. Nora elected to go visiting with her mother, and Frank and I decided to look up his old friends in the village. The number of them appeared to be legion. Frank seemed to be regarded as a general hero, and many were the exclamations of wonder and astonishment at his tales of school life. We found ourselves at last under the hospitable roof of Martha Pogran—"Old Martha," as she was known to the villagers. Her age might have been anything over eighty—she admitted seventy-five—and she was the acknowledged gossip and source of information in Peddlington. Her dignity was enhanced by the fact that she had once actually boarded a lodger—the only lodger ever known to visit the neighbourhood—and in her front parlour window there still hung a card bearing the doubtful legend, "Lodgers taken in."

Old Martha received us in her little shop, which contained all the villagers' simple needs, from buttons to anchors and fitches of bacon to toffee drops.

"Come away in, Master Frank, come away in. Eh! but I'm main glad to see you back again," and

leaving the shop in charge of a little girl called Nancy, whose head hardly reached the counter, she ushered us into the dingy parlour. "Sit ye down, Master Frank, with your friend, and I'll bring you a bottle of your favourite ginger beer and some bull's eyes," she said, and bustling out of the room returned a minute later with the promised delicacies.

"What's been doing in the village?" began Frank, as the old lady poured out the ginger beer. "Have you had any more lodgers?"

It was a point of etiquette with all visitors to address this polite inquiry to old Martha when starting a gossip, though it was more than fifteen years since the one famous lodger had passed from beneath her roof.

"No; the place is quiet now to what it used to be, Master Frank. There's been none passing through lately. Storm's eldest lad has listed, and Liza Potter be going to marry 'the post,' and a poor wife she'll make him!"

Liza Potter was the acknowledged beauty of Peddlington, while George Barnes, the local postman, was familiarly known as "the post."

"Young John Storm will make a fine soldier,"

commented Frank—"he is a great strong fellow; but I thought he was going to marry Liza?"

"So did he, and all the village but myself," replied the old dame. "I saw through the saucy hussy from the first, and warned John o' her, but he gave no heed. So now he's gone and listed.—Will ye no try the bull's eyes, sir?"

Martha's offer was too tempting to refuse, and I availed myself of it with alacrity; an example Frank was not slow to follow.

"Well, we must be going off," said my chum at last. "Many thanks for the ginger beer and bull's eyes; they are just as good as ever. By-the-bye, you haven't told me how Peter is. Have you seen him lately?"

"I don't know what's come over Peter," she answered. "I don't like the way he's going on at all. Fortnight come Thursday he was in here with a long story about ghosts at the castle, his face white as putty and his eyes staring. No, I don't like the looks of him. I'm feart he's no long for this world."

"But why, Martha? Surely you don't believe that rubbish about ghosts, do you?"

"No, no, Master Frank, I don't hold by them; but when folks *think* they see ghosts, there's illness or

trouble coming to them. It was so with Kate Drennan afore her father was killed, and with William Frame, who was drowned about the time you were born. You mark old Martha's words," she continued, shaking a bony finger solemnly at us; "ghosts or no ghosts, trouble is brewing for Peter. He has the mark of it on him."

"Ugh! she quite gave me the shivers," said Frank as we emerged again, "talking about poor Peter like that. We must go and see him soon and hear about these bally ghosts. Rather good sport, ghost-hunting, eh?"

"Yes, in the daytime, but at night—"

"Oh, I say, you're as bad as Nora. What does it matter whether it's night or day? You can always walk through a ghost, you know, and—hullo! there's Bobby. Let's go and hear what he's got to say about it all."

There was no chance of mistaking Bobby, the one policeman Peddlington boasted. Once seen he was not easily forgotten. He was standing at his open door, a little way down the street on the side opposite old Martha's shop, mopping his brow, for the afternoon was warm. Well over six feet in his huge regulation boots, his massive shoulders were surmounted by a

round, genial countenance that beamed good fellowship on all comers.

"Why, Master Frank," he exclaimed, touching his forelock, "I would hardly have known you. You're grown that big. You'll be showing us all how to play cricket now. Dod! I remember how you bowled me last summer, though you was but a little slip of a chap."

Now this was nicely put on Bobby's part, because Frank had confided to me that on the memorable occasion under review Bobby had lifted Frank's first four balls for successive sixes clean out of the ground, and only succumbed to the fifth, which happened to be a shooter.

"Oh, rot, Bobby," rejoined my chum, looking well pleased, all the same. "You know you lammed me all over the shop; but I'll put up some better stuff to you this year. This is my friend Humphrey Verney, who has come to spend his holidays with us."

"Pleased to meet you, sir," answered the man, pulling his forelock again.

"I say," went on Frank, "what is all this about Peter seeing ghosts up at the castle? Do you know anything about it?"

"Well, sir," said Bobby, scratching his head with a

puzzled look, "Peter has been telling the folks some such tale, and last week he come to me about it. 'Peter, man,' says I, 'you're far too sensible a fellow to believe in ghosts.' 'I used to be,' says he, shaking like, 'but these last few weeks I've heard enough to upset any man, and twice I seemed to see figures in white at the castle windows.' 'And what is it you heard, Peter?' says I. 'Terrible groans and clankin' of chains. The noise is worse at night, but I've heard it during the day too.' 'Well, Peter,' says I, to hearten him like, 'I'm going your way now, and we'll go over the castle and see if we can't lay the ghost.' And so we did, but nary a ghost did we see or hear."

"Well, we must have a ghost-hunt too, Humphrey; but we had better be off if we are to walk to the station and bike back before dinner.—So long, Bobby."

"No wonder the ghosts didn't put in an appearance before him," I observed as we set off along the road; "these boots of his would drown any ghostly groans, and any self-respecting spook would keep clear of his feet."

"You bet," said Frank, grinning, "but still it sounds as if we might get some good sport ghost-

hunting up at the castle. Peter must have seen and heard something surely."

We walked on steadily till within a short distance of the station, when Frank, who had been unusually silent for some time, suddenly exclaimed, "It's the very ticket!"

"What is?" I asked, mystified.

"A Sherlock Holmes Society!"

"What on earth is that?"

"Oh, we'll make a secret compact to find out everything the way Sherlock Holmes did. Last holidays I read how some fellows formed such a society and got publicly thanked by all sorts of swells. They found out heaps of plots and things, and had no end of a good time."

"But what are we to find out, and who's going to thank us?"

"It's the society's business to find out what has to be found out," replied Frank, rather vaguely. "But there's Peter's ghosts to start on anyway; Sherlock Holmes would have found out about them in two ticks. I'll think it over and make out the rules and that sort of thing. Will you join?"

"Oh yes, if you like."

We reached the station, and got our bicycles from

the shed where they had been stored; then having mounted we started on our return home, waving our caps in farewell to the stationmaster.

"Now, then," said Frank, "let's have a race up the hill. We can rest there a bit, and then it's all downhill to the village. The heap of road metal at the top will be the winning post. Are you ready? go!"

We were both in good condition, and put in all we knew. Gradually I forged ahead, but when I had gained a lead of some ten yards Frank put in a tremendous spurt and passed me. The effort tired him, however, and I had crept up to him again when we reached the heap of stones and jumped off simultaneously.

"Dead heat!" panted Frank as we propped up our machines and threw ourselves on the grass, where we lay for some time regaining our breath and revelling in the thought that there was no school bell to hasten our return. At last Frank sat up and looked at his watch.

"Half-past five. There's plenty of time, but we might put up the net and have a cricket practice before dinner."

"Right you are; come on. Hullo! there's your

friend Win Kee coming along, but what on earth is he doing ? ”

The Chinaman was approaching us from the village, but had not yet noticed our presence, and for a few minutes we watched him with some amusement. For a certain distance he would walk slowly towards us, gazing at the grass on one side of the road. Then he would retrace his steps, scrutinizing the ditch at the other side. This manœuvre he repeated over and over again, each time a little farther down the road.

“ He’s lost something,” said Frank ; “ let’s find out what it is. You can try your Malay on him, if you remember any. Perhaps we had better not say anything about last night, in case you made a mistake, you know.”

“ All right, but wait a moment,” I said, grasping his arm as he was about to shout. “ Don’t tell him I know any Malay just at first.”

“ Why not ? ”

“ Just for a lark.”

“ All right. Hullo ! ”

The Chinaman was coming towards us when Frank called ; he gave a sudden start and looked up quickly.

“ You lost something, Win Kee ? ” inquired Frank as we wheeled our bicycles towards him.

"How you know that?" he asked, gazing suspiciously at us.

"We saw you looker in ditch; what is it? Perhaps we can help you."

"Yes'day I dlop a paper for C'nel Leighton."

"Oh, a letter. We haven't seen anything lying on the road, and we've been down to the station. I hope you find it. I come up soon to Cliffden and bring my friend Verney. He see you make something with wire like you showed me. He would like hear you speak Malay, Win Kee."

The Chinaman looked at me keenly, and it seemed to me that his eyes were lighter in colour than those of the coolies and native servants I remembered.

"Your friend come from—where?" he asked, with seeming indifference.

"From the same school," I interposed.

"Tell him in Malay you've lost a letter, Win Kee," suggested Frank.

The Chinaman gabbled something, and Frank burst out laughing.

"I don't believe you understand a word of it after all," he said to me; and then, turning to the Chinaman and unable to repress himself any longer, he explained:

"He can speakee a little Malay too, Win Kee; he comee from Singapore."

A swift change swept over the Oriental's face, and he regarded me with what seemed a vindictive scowl.

"Why you not say so? Win Kee talk no more Malay," and turning on his heel he set off towards the station.

"Well, of all the rum goes!" ejaculated Frank, staring after him. "What's up?"

"Don't ask me! I couldn't make out a word he said, but he didn't know that. Can he read English?"

"I don't know. Wait a bit though—I don't believe he can. I remember now that father tried him on, one time when he thought he had been looking at his letters in the post office, and the chap didn't know A from Z."

"Then," I remarked, as we remounted our bicycles, "how is he to recognize this letter even if he finds it? Don't you think the Sherlock Holmes Society might keep an eye on him as well as the ghosts?"

"Oh, rot," was Frank's polite rejoinder; "Win Kee's all right."

CHAPTER IV.

THE SECRET SOCIETY.

AT dinner the same evening Dr. Naismith was informed of Nora's story about a burglar having been in the house, and of our search in the study.

"But you found the money all right?" he asked his wife, when she had finished speaking.

"Yes; four five-pound notes and one ten. You told me you had drawn thirty pounds."

"Yes, that is right; and a burglar would hardly have left such a haul if he had been in the room. Bouncer, too, would have barked and warned us. Do you not think you must have dreamt it all, Nora?"

"No, father, I didn't; at least, in the morning I was quite sure it wasn't a dream, but in daylight it seems so different and far away. And then Humphrey saw Win Kee."

"Yes, but that seems to have been some time after you heard the noises you speak of; and remember he was then coming toward the house. In that dim light Humphrey admits he could not be quite certain of identifying Colonel Leighton's servant, and it would be unreasonable to accuse him on such slight evidence.—By-the-bye," he continued, turning to his wife, "did you leave the money in my desk?"

"Yes, dear; I locked the drawer the notes were in—the second top on the right—and put the key on your dressing-table."

"The second top on the right? Are you sure? I always keep my cash and bank book in the top drawer on the left."

"Quite sure," repeated Mrs. Naismith. "The children were with me at the time."

We corroborated her statement; and remarking that he must have been mistaken, and that so long as the money was safe it didn't matter, Dr. Naismith turned to us and inquired how we had passed the afternoon.

Frank launched into a graphic description of our visit to the village and subsequent expedition to the station, winding up with an account of our meeting with Win Kee and his strange behaviour.

"It was curious, certainly," remarked his father thoughtfully; "but allowance must be made for the fact that he is an Oriental. They look at things from a different point of view, remember.—I had forgotten you could speak Malay," he added, turning to me.

"I really know very little now," I replied; "it is several years since I came to England."

"Have you heard lately from your father? Dear me! it seems but yesterday that he and I were at school together, and now he is well up in the Government service. Your mother's death must have made a great difference to him."

"He is very quiet and sad now, and his hair is quite gray. I do not remember my mother at all; she died when I was quite little."

"Poor boy!" said Mrs. Naismith softly, and a sharp kick under the table assured me of Nora's sympathy.

"Now I think of it," went on Dr. Naismith reflectively, "you must have been out in the East at the same time as Colonel Leighton. Frank has told you about him, I suppose?"

"Yes, but I don't remember him at all. You see we lived up country, in the Malay States, and it is

only recently—since I came home—that father has gone to live in Singapore.”

“Well, well, I must write and tell my old friend what a big fellow you are growing. I am sure the sea air here will do you good; you are getting quite sunburnt already. My wife has written to ask your aunt if you may spend the whole of your holidays with us.”

“It is very kind of you indeed, and I should enjoy it awfully,” I stammered, for the idea of leaving the country and spending most of the summer mewed up in London was not exhilarating.

“Hurrah!” shouted Frank, upsetting his tumbler; “then we’ll have plenty of time to form the society and make things hum.”

“What society?” asked Mrs. Naismith, with a puzzled expression.

“Oh, just a society—a society, you know,” replied Frank, confusedly mopping up the water with his napkin.

Dr. Naismith laughed. “The society you should form is the Society for the Prevention of Getting into Mischief! And now be off and have a scamper, and then to sleep. Early to bed, early to rise, you know.”

The first week of the holidays passed like a flash so happy and fully occupied were the days. We fished, bathed, bicycled, and picnicked to our hearts' content and our very obvious physical benefit. I never happened to come across Colonel Leighton, and had almost forgotten Win Kee and the ghosts at the castle. But suddenly the spell of fine weather broke, and one morning we woke to find the sea blotted from sight by a drizzling rain which poured down persistently.

"You must make up your minds for a wet day, children," remarked Dr. Naismith, as he tapped the barometer in the hall after breakfast. "The glass is still falling, and until the wind changes from the east there is little prospect of an improvement. The farmers will be thankful for this rain." Saying good-bye to his wife, he pulled on his waterproof, and drove off to visit his patients as cheerfully as though the sun shone brightly.

"Bother the farmers!" growled Frank; "they're always complaining about something, and wanting rain. Selfish beggars I call them."

"And who would be the first to grumble if the crops failed, and there was not enough bread to eat?" asked his mother smilingly. "You have had a lot of

fine days out of doors, and must just make the best of this wet weather. I am sure there must be a lot of books in the library you have not yet read."

"Oh yes; but it's poor fun not getting out."

"Well, perhaps later on you can put on your waterproofs and do the messages for me in the village."

So with this promise we made our way to the library and selected books. Nora chose "The Mutiny of the Bounty," and I was soon absorbed in "The White Company;" but Frank seemed unable to find one to his taste, and after pulling out a lot and replacing them haphazard, upside down, he banged out of the room. Absorbed in my book, the minutes flew by, and it seemed no time till Mrs. Naismith was heard calling to Nora, who, on her return to the library, announced that she had received the messages, and was going down to the village. I volunteered to accompany her. We shouted to Frank, telling him we were ready; but getting no reply, Mrs. Naismith advised us to start without him.

"No doubt he would have answered if he wished to go," she said.

So Nora and I set off in the soft rain by ourselves, and once the village was reached I grew bewildered

at the rapidity with which my arms became loaded with parcels. Nora's memory surprised me; it was extraordinary. I might have remembered the fowl and the eggs, and perhaps the butter; but the vegetables, baking soda, sewing cotton, and various other items would certainly have been forgotten.

"There," sighed my companion at last, carefully balancing a large blue paper bag on top of the pile of parcels I was already carrying—"there! that's cooking sugar for making toffee this afternoon. Mother said I might get some. Isn't she ripping? It's awfully good of you to carry everything; do you mind? Frank won't carry anything when he comes with me."

I protested it was quite a pleasure, though I felt my fingers making their way into something soft, which I guessed to be butter. We had almost reached the top of the hill leading out of Peddlington when Nora turned to me abruptly and asked a question.

"You told mother the night you came that Frank had won the English prize?"

"Ye—es."

"But how could he? he can't spell even."

"Oh," I answered vaguely, "it wasn't that kind of English."

“What kind was it then?”

“History and recitations and—and—all that sort of thing.”

“Frank never could remember dates, and he hates poetry. Besides, he seemed to have forgotten about it;” and she looked at me searchingly. I knew my face was growing red, and would have felt more comfortable and at ease with my hands in my pockets, but these wretched parcels prevented that. Nora continued her cross-examination relentlessly.

“How many boys are there in his English class?”

“Three.”

“Who are they?”

“Frank and Bullen and Taylor.”

“But Taylor went away last term; Frank wrote and told us.”

“Yes,” I admitted, dropping a parcel to divert attention.

“Stupid,” cried Nora, lifting it out of the mud and replacing it. “And what became of Bullen?”

“Became of him?” I repeated in desperation; “why should you suppose—”

“Tell me!”

“Well,” I admitted reluctantly, driven to bay, “he took ill.”

"I *knew* there was something queer about it," said Nora triumphantly, "from the way Frank looked at you when you told mother."

"You won't say anything?" I pleaded.

"Of course not. *I* don't sneak," she retorted in a tone that made me regret my admissions. Really it was hardly fair, and I dug my fingers into the butter by way of relieving my feelings. After this little tiff Nora walked in front of me all the way home, and I followed meekly behind, as though in disgrace. Mrs. Naismith met us at the door.

"O Nora," she exclaimed, "why did you make Humphrey carry *all* the parcels? They must have been very troublesome—and look at the butter!"

"Well, mother, it was his own fault. He said he liked it, and so I let him alone." With a saucy toss of her head Nora passed into the house, and I found myself confirming her statement, much to my own amazement.

Frank reappeared at lunch-time, and in answer to his mother's questions stated that he had spent the morning writing.

"Do you mean writing letters?" she asked in some surprise.

"Well—no—not exactly," was his vague reply;

and seeing that he was unwilling to say more, Mrs. Naismith did not press him further. The rain was coming down more heavily than ever, and when our meal was finished we adjourned to the schoolroom to make toffee and amuse ourselves as best we might, while Mrs. Naismith went to the library to finish her correspondence.

Nora installed herself immediately as head-cook; I was appointed kitchenmaid; while Frank looked on and made suggestions.

"I say, you two," he began suddenly, when things seemed fairly under way, "what do you think I was doing this morning?"

"Writing, according to yourself," I replied, busily buttering a large dish.

"Yes, of course; but what?" he asked mysteriously.

"A poem or an essay," replied the cook, working her ladle energetically.

"Rot! what do you take me for?" exclaimed Frank, producing a crumpled piece of paper.

"The winner of the English prize!" retorted his sister, without looking round. I felt that Frank was glaring suspiciously at me, but the buttering process luckily occupied my attention.

"Well, you're wrong, anyway," resumed Frank, after an awkward pause. "I was having no end of a swot drawing up the rules for the Sherlock Holmes Society."

"What's that?" asked Nora in a puzzled voice.

Frank promptly explained his ideas, and offered bashfully to read his rules for our edification.

"I had to rummage in your school togs for paper and pencil, Humphrey," he acknowledged, "because I cleared out my pockets before I left Brotherton. Now tell me if you think these will do."

RULES FOR THE IVY COTTAGE SHERLOCK HOLMES SOCIETY.

- I. The Society shall consist of three members.
- II. Each Member shall swear to keep the Society secret.
- III. The entrance-fee to be 1s.
- IV. The objects of the Society to be explained by the President.
- V. All members shall obey the President.

"Well?" said Frank, after a long pause.

"Is that all?" said Nora contemptuously. "I don't see the use of having only five little rules like these; I thought there would be a long list, like what there is on father's bowling-club card."

"Oh, we don't need so many as that," explained Frank; "but there must be some, or it wouldn't be a proper society."

"But why should there be only three members?"

"To keep it secret, of course."

"But every member has to swear to keep it secret."

This did not appear to have struck Frank, and after some discussion Rule I. was amended, with the words "or more" added to it. Rule II. was passed unanimously, as it was felt that there would be no fun in a society that was not secret. Rule III. was then put to the vote.

"What is an entrance-fee for?" asked the practical Nora. "I don't see why we should pay for hunting ghosts and helping people."

"Oh, we might have to buy matches or pistols, or things like that," explained the founder of the society vaguely. "There is always an entrance-fee."

"I shan't join if there's pistols," replied the cook, stirring vigorously; "and we can always get a box of matches from Jane."

"You must do what the president tells you," said Frank sternly.

"But we haven't elected a president yet!"

In the end it was decided that the rule should stand, but that it need not be enforced, as none of the intending members could rise to the subscription.

"Then as to Rule IV., I suppose I had better be

president," suggested Frank modestly ; and as the cook's attention was taken up with the toffee for the moment, Rule IV. passed without opposition.

Rule V. followed as a matter of course, for, as Frank ingenuously put it, there was no use electing a president unless you meant to obey him. Then followed the signing of the document. The president led off, Nora followed, and I brought up the rear.

"You surely didn't get this in my pocket, Frank," I said, examining the piece of paper when it came to my turn to sign ; "I never saw it before."

"Yes, I did. It was in your pocket with a lot of others."

Turning over the paper curiously, I read on the other side, scrawled in pencil, "Ware beeks. The cap. wants oof." The remainder was almost illegible, but I seemed to make out something about "tens" and "fivers."

"Never mind about that," exclaimed Frank, when I drew his attention to the writing ; "hurry up and sign."

This I did, and the precious document was then handed over to my safe keeping, the president remarking that, if left in his charge, it was almost certain to be lost.

The cook's announcement that the toffee was ready distracted our attention, and when the pan had been emptied and carefully scraped of the last morsel, Frank offered to carry the dish and put it in the bathroom to cool quickly.

"Do you know why I joined the society?" asked Nora, turning to me as her brother left the room.

"To find out ghosts and things."

"No, I'm frightened of ghosts; but I want to find out who I really am. Will you help me?"

"Of course; but I don't think I can do much."

"But you promise?"

"Yes, I promise."

The bathroom door slammed, and the president was heard approaching, whistling ostentatiously to prove that he had refrained from further tasting.

"Oh, thank you so much," whispered Nora hurriedly; "I'm sorry I called you a sneak this morning."

About four o'clock the weather cleared up, and the president, anxious to show off his recently acquired authority, issued orders for a general inspection of Fareham Castle; and the newly formed Sherlock Holmes Society loyally obeyed his commands, and set forth on their bicycles.

"This is Peter's cottage," announced Frank, as we dismounted at the avenue gates; "but before I knock we had better decide who we are. Of course I'm Sherlock Holmes, and you're Dr. Watson, Humphrey; but who can Nora be?"

"Mycroft," I suggested, not altogether relishing the part assigned to me.

"But he was rather a rotter," objected Frank, "and had an awful idea of himself." Which was another way of saying that he might take the shine out of Sherlock.

"There is no one else any use," I observed.

"No; I'll be Mycroft," said Nora decisively. "I remember about him. He simply sat still and let Sherlock do all the work. You can discover all the ghosts, Frank."

"All right," said the president, "that will do; but remember, don't let Peter know what we're after—it's a secret."

We nodded, and followed him inside the gate. Propping our bicycles against the ivy-covered lodge, we waited in the little porch while Frank plied the knocker.

"Ahoy!" shouted a voice, in answer to the deafening summons, "I'm coming;" and next minute the

door was opened by a red-faced old man with a white beard.

"Well, Peter, how are you?" said Frank, holding out his hand.

"Why, Master Frank, is that you? What a big boy you've grown, to be sure! Come in.—Come in, Miss Nora."

"We've come to see over the castle, Peter. This is Dr.—I mean Humphrey—Verney, my chum. We want to show him over the place. Can you come with us now, or will you let us have the keys?"

"I'll come with you, and welcome," was the reply; but the speaker's looks belied his words.

"Don't bother about coming if you are busy with anything," said Frank, as the old man slowly took down a large bunch of keys from a nail on the wall.

"I'm not busy," answered the old man; "and I'm real glad of company, Master Frank, and that's the truth. I was telling Miss Nora here about it the other day."

"Do tell us again," said Frank eagerly. "We heard in the village that you had heard ghosts, and we came here to—" But a judicious pinch from Mycroft stopped further disclosures.

"Ay, ay," muttered our guide, as we trooped after him up the avenue. "They laugh at old Peter's stories, but none of them will come here o' nights to find out the truth of them or bear me company."

For a few minutes we trudged along in silence, waiting for the old man to continue.

"Master Frank," he said at length, turning and gripping the president's arm so suddenly that the latter started visibly—"Master Frank, it was from this very spot that I first saw the ghost!"

All agog with excitement, we crept closer together, glancing apprehensively round at the neighbouring bushes.

"One night last winter I was coming up here, as I do every night to see that everything is right at the castle, when a light suddenly shone out in the west wing. Look! through that clump of rhododendrons you can see the very window."

With our gaze we followed his outstretched finger, and saw the gray walls of the castle close at hand. Opposite where we were standing a small, rounded turret jutted out, and near the foot appeared a small, low basement.

"I thought the place was on fire," resumed Peter, "and ran on quickly; but suddenly the light seemed

to go out. Hurrying round I unlocked the door ; but on reaching the room where the light had appeared I found—nothing. Everything seemed to be just as usual. The window was fastened ; there was no sign of fire nor of any recent occupation.”

The old man paused, and looked at us solemnly.

“Maybe you’ll not believe me, Master Frank ; but as I stood there wondering if my old eyes had played me false, I suddenly heard the sound of bolts being drawn, and chains rattled somewhere down in the cellars. There came a kind of shriek and a loud bang, and then all was silent again.”

I don’t know how the rest of the society felt, but I can vouch for it that Dr. Watson was thankful that the sun shone brightly and, lighting up the gray walls of the castle, seemed to mock at the old man’s story.

“I can tell you I was near mad with fright,” went on Peter, “and rushed helter-skelter out of the castle. Next morning, when it was broad daylight, I came back and searched the cellars, and found nothing ; but since then I have often heard the same sounds—sometimes by day, sometimes by night. Several times there were whisperings, and once—once I saw a white figure vanish down a corridor. So I am

afraid to be by myself, Master Frank; but with company it's not so bad."

By this time we had reached the little side-entrance which Peter generally used. It led through the gun-room and billiard-room to the portrait gallery, and as we entered a sudden hush fell on us all. The blinds were drawn, and in the dim light the eerie stillness of the huge empty building caused the ardour of the Sherlock Holmes Society to droop visibly. The members kept very close together, and the president followed hard on the heels of his guide. Just before we entered the portrait gallery Peter drew our attention to a little passage leading off the main corridor. "That leads to the turret," he announced; "would you like to go there?"

The president hurriedly assured him that it was the pictures he wished me to see, and we passed on into the gallery, a long, gloomy chamber. Peter's knowledge of the family history was not extensive, and we were forced to rely on our own imaginations for the most part regarding the portraits, in lieu of definite information. Starting at the end we entered, we scanned the long rows of knights and ladies, and marvelled at their strange dress and appearance. Near the centre of the gallery Peter pointed out a

full-length portrait of a young lady, who, he informed us, was the grandmother of the present Lord Gresham.

"A great beauty she was, too, in her day, though she's dead and gone now," he informed us. "Old Martha remembers seeing her. Many a noble wished to marry her, and her father, 'tis said, promised her hand to a duke. But my lady had a will of her own, and one fine day, when she was only seventeen, she ran off with her lover to Gretna Green, and a terrible to-do there was."

Frank listened carelessly, and moved on to examine the painting of an armoured knight, which interested him much more; but Nora stood gazing at the lady, and begged Peter to tell her all he knew about the story. The old man readily complied, and when he saw how interested she seemed, he stepped over to the windows and pulled up several of the blinds. From the first glance at the portrait I had been haunted by the curious feeling that the lady's features were strangely familiar, and as the light fell on the face the reason flashed across my mind.

"Why, she is as like you as possible, Nora," I exclaimed; and indeed the resemblance was remarkable. The golden brown hair, the smiling gray eyes,

and the saucy little nose and mouth, were unmistakably reproduced in my companion.

"I think she *is* very like me," answered Nora, with heightened colour.

"Oh, rot!" ejaculated Frank, coming back; "you're always thinking you're a fairy or princess or something, you know. But, I say, it *is* a bit like you with your hair up, only you're not half so pretty."

The three of us were gazing curiously from the portrait to the girl, when Nora, who had turned to let the light fall on her face, suddenly gave a cry, and pointed down the room behind us.

"Look! Peter, some one crossed the corridor and went down the passage to the turret!"

CHAPTER V.

THE GHOST.

NORA'S startled cry rang out so suddenly and unexpectedly that for a moment we could do nothing but gaze stupidly in the direction she pointed. Even Sherlock Holmes's wits seemed to leave him, and old Peter was the first to pull himself together.

"Some one gone into the turret, d'ye say? Like enough it's another o' them pestering ghosts or bogles or whatever they be. Was it in white, missy?"

"No, I think it was in navy blue or gray; but it moved so quick I hardly saw it. O Peter, I am frightened. Do you really think it was a ghost?"

Poor Nora clung, white and trembling, to the old man, who took her hands in his and patted them kindly.

"There, there," he said soothingly, "don't 'ee be frightened, dearie; old Peter will take care of you.

Ghosts don't walk in daylight. Like enough it was only a shadow."

"No, no, it wasn't a shadow; I am sure I saw something. Oh, do let us get out of the castle again."

The old man paused irresolute. To do him justice, he had little fear of anything in daylight, and his sense of duty urged him to make an immediate search for the strange intruder.

"Ay, ay," he said at last, "I'll take you back again. But stay you here with Master Frank and his friend, while I look into the turret. Then we—"

"No, no; I want to stay with you," pleaded Nora.

The sight of her fear somehow banished my own uneasy feelings and made me feel ashamed.

"Let us all go together," I suggested, "and make a search. Perhaps," I added, with a glance at the president to remind him of the main purpose of our errand—"perhaps we might come across a clue." Sherlock certainly did not jump at my suggestion, but Peter settled the matter for him.

"Ay, ay, we'll all go together," he said, putting the keys in his pocket and grasping his stick more firmly. "Come along."

We started back down the gallery, with Nora between us and Frank following just behind. The latter pointed out to me afterwards that in a retreat the rear is always the post of danger and honour, but certainly this did not strike us at the time. The distance seemed somehow to have increased, and our steps rang loud in the stillness of the empty gallery; but at last we entered the corridor, and reached the little passage running off it. Here we were forced to proceed in single file, and Peter led the way, with Nora close behind. Not a sound was to be heard save our own shuffling footsteps, and almost before we were aware of it we had passed through a narrow stone archway, and found ourselves in the little round turret. The room was empty! A slanting ray of sunshine glinting through the low latticed window lit up the bare stone walls and emphasized the fact that there was no one there. The members of the Sherlock Holmes Society breathed more freely and plucked up courage. Old Peter grunted.

"Humph," he muttered; "it is always the same—nothing to be found."

We gazed round the empty room curiously. This was the place from whence had shone the mysterious light which had startled Peter, and from under our

feet had come the ominous sounds he had heard. In olden times, doubtless, the room had been occupied by archers and men at arms; but nowadays, in daylight, at any rate, the place seemed commonplace enough.

"No clues to be picked up here," whispered Frank to me after a professional glance round; "we are on the wrong scent."

Reassured by our investigations, the president was now anxious to make further explorations; but Mycroft stoutly objected, saying she had seen enough for one day, and wanted to go home. After a somewhat acrimonious discussion the president gave in, on the understanding that an hour's fielding at the nets would be exacted in return for his clemency. As we turned to leave the room my eye caught sight of something white lying against the wall just under the window, and hardly knowing why, I picked up the half-burned match and put it in my pocket. Then hastening after the others, we passed through the billiard and gun rooms to the side door by which we had entered. Here we said good-bye to Peter. Since entering the turret the old man had been strangely silent, and we all noticed how red his face had become and how heavily he breathed. His voice, too, was husky and his utterance thick.

"I must go back to pull down the blinds and lock the doors," he said. "Good-bye, Miss Nora—good-bye, young gentlemen. Come again soon."

"Good-bye, Peter," we chorussed, waving our hands to him, none of us guessing what a long farewell we were bidding the kind old man.

"How red and funny he looks!" remarked Nora as we walked down the avenue.

"He's still funky, I expect," replied her brother carelessly as he strode along whistling gaily, having evidently quite recovered his spirits.

"I don't believe he's a bit funky," retorted Nora; "people turn white when they are frightened—like you and Humphrey."

"I didn't get white," protested Frank indignantly; "it was only you with your silly crying. I don't believe there was anything there after all."

Our arrival at the lodge, and the discovery that one of Nora's tyres needed pumping, prevented further squabbling, and once we were mounted and out on the open road Frank's next remark turned our thoughts to the object of the expedition.

"I say," he exclaimed excitedly, "I've discovered a clue! Did either of you notice that little square

window in the corridor near the turret? Well, it was open; I'm sure it was."

"But what good is that?" I asked.

"Why, don't you see, stupid, that's the way the ghost gets in and out!"

"But ghosts don't need open windows," objected Nora; "they can go wherever they want."

This was rather a poser for Sherlock, who contented himself with repeating doggedly, "It's a clue anyway, and neither of you noticed anything. I told you Mycroft wasn't really up to much!"

"He is—I mean I am," said Nora, annoyed at this taunt. "I found a far better clue than that, but I won't tell you. You will only laugh at me, I know."

"No, no, we won't; do tell us," I urged.

"Well," she replied slowly, "when the ghost turned into the little passage leading to the turret the light was very bad; but I saw it pretty clearly, and I think—I *think* it was—"

"Who, who?" we asked eagerly.

"Win Kee!"

"The colonel's Chinaman again!"

"Win Kee! rubbish! You and Humphrey are always trying to make out that he is a scoundrel."

"Well, you asked me to tell you, and promised not

to laugh at me. I'm sure the real Sherlock Holmes wouldn't."

Frank was about to make some scoffing remark when I interposed.

"It is a more exciting clue than mine," I began, fumbling in my pocket with my left hand.

"Bravo, Watson," cried Frank; "let's hear yours."

"You won't think it much good, but just as we left the turret I saw something white lying on the floor, and picked up—this."

"Only a match," exclaimed Frank in disgust.

"Another wax vesta," said Nora. "It is funny that you should have found one there too."

"Oh, you mean it has something to do with the one you saw in the study at home when we searched it. I don't see why you should look upon it as a clue. Every one uses matches."

"Yes, but I don't think Peter uses wax vestas. I saw a box of these cheap wooden ones lying in his house."

"But even then I don't see that it proves anything," argued Frank, evidently annoyed that the match had escaped his notice.

"Sherlock Holmes found clues in apples and cigar ashes," remarked Nora, who appeared to

have been studying the memoirs of the famous detective.

"Yes, but people don't smoke matches," retorted Frank.

"No, but they light cigars and candles with them," I observed, "and there were a lot of grease marks on the stone floor."

By this time we had passed through the village and reached the sharp hill leading up on to the cliffs. The ascent was too much for Nora, and I dismounted to keep her company; but putting on a tremendous spurt, Frank managed to rush the incline. Almost immediately he came tearing back, shouting excitedly, "I told you—all rot—he's here."

"Who's here? What did you tell us?" we asked in bewilderment.

"Win Kee. He's working in the colonel's garden. Look, there he is. How about seeing him at the castle now?"

He was right. Even at that distance it was impossible to mistake the figure Frank pointed out and as president of the Sherlock Holmes Society he proceeded to show his sister the folly of allowing her imagination to run away with her, and also of jumping to conclusions.

"If it hadn't been for you we might have been at Fareham yet finding out all sorts of things," was his final crushing reproof.

"But perhaps he ran back in front of us," suggested Nora, much crestfallen.

"Perhaps he didn't," jeered Frank. "He must be a rattling good runner when we couldn't overtake him on our bikes; and Humphrey told me that Chinamen are poor runners.—Didn't you, Humphrey?"

"Yes," I admitted, "they aren't much good except the rickshaw coolies; but somehow Win Kee is unlike any of the Chinamen I remember. He is too—"

"There you go," interrupted Frank, "running down the poor beggar. You both seem to have a spite against him. You'll be making out he's a burglar in disguise next. Anyhow, Nora's spoilt the afternoon, and we'll have to begin all over again."

"Oh, well, never mind," I said as we wheeled our bikes into the outhouse; "you've discovered that clue about the open window, you know, and there's plenty of time for a game at cricket yet before dinner. Nora and I will play you—giving you the innings. What do you say?"

With the prospect of a long spell of batting, Frank accepted the challenge at once, and the wickets were

soon pitched on the lawn in front of the house. Nora was inclined to be huffy at first, but forgot her grievances when she had the pleasure of bowling the president for a duck's egg. The latter took his revenge in his second innings, and Bouncer and I had a busy and exciting time fielding. The retriever enjoyed the game as much as any of us, and had to be chased as often as the ball. Aided by his antics, Frank's score rose by leaps and bounds until at last his ally proved his undoing. The batsman took a mighty swipe, and made a mishit over his head. Bouncer picked up the ball before I could reach it, and was off like a flash. Round and round the lawn he scampered amidst a chorus of yells and shouts. "Catch him, Humphrey catch him!" cried Nora.

"Bravo, Bouncer; run, good dog!" panted Frank, tearing up and down the pitch. Eight had already been scored off the hit, when, endeavouring to dodge a desperate rush on my part, the puppy brushed against the wicket towards which the batsman was running. "How's that?" I yelled.

"Out!" cried Nora in delight.—"Well stumped, Bouncer!"

Frank was too much puffed out to protest, and when he had recovered breath he announced that his innings

totalled seventy-six. Nora was inclined to dispute his arithmetic; but as the dinner hour was drawing near there was no time to lose, and she took up her position at the crease. Frank was too fagged to bowl his fastest, and whenever the bat touched the ball I took care that Bouncer should do the fielding. In this way the score mounted quickly, and before she was bowled Nora had the satisfaction of making thirty-seven—the highest score in her career. Even our opponent joined generously in the applause which greeted her on retiring, and Bouncer gambolled about barking excitedly, as much as to say, “Well done, well done; but don’t forget my share.” Knowing that only a few minutes remained for play, I went in for slogging with such success that it seemed likely that our side would win after all. When within five of the opposing total, however, Frank brought off a splendid catch which ended the game, and we had just time to put away the stumps and have a hasty wash before the dinner bell rang.

“Well, children,” said Dr. Naismith, looking from one flushed face to another, “you seem to have been making up for your enforced idleness this morning. I heard the shouts from my study. How did the game go?”

"Oh, Frank won as usual, father. I bowled him the first time, and Bouncer ran him out the second. You should have seen Humphrey chasing him; it was great fun."

"Who was it Humphrey was chasing, eh?—Frank or Bouncer?"

"Bouncer, of course. He ran away with the ball whenever he got it."

"And I fancy he was allowed to get it very often when a certain little girl was batting," remarked Mrs. Naismith, smiling. "How many runs did you make?"

"Thirty-seven," was the proud reply.

"Dear me, what a tremendous score!" exclaimed Dr. Naismith in mock astonishment. "You boys will have to look to your laurels at this rate. But where were you after tea? When I got home about five you were all out."

"Oh, we bicycled over to Fareham Castle," began Frank, eager to relate our doings. "We wanted to let Humphrey see the place; and, besides, it was a chance for the society—I mean to get clues, you know, and—"

He stopped and poured himself out another glass of water to hide his confusion, while Dr. Naismith looked at his wife and smiled.

"That mysterious society again! Really we must inquire into this," he said, his eyes twinkling; "it would never do for a respectable country doctor to harbour a secret society under his roof. I must warn old Peter.—Take care they don't lead you into mischief, Humphrey. And what did you think of the castle?"

"It seems a jolly big place," I answered, seeing Frank's embarrassment, "and the pictures are splendid. We—"

"Oh yes, the pictures," interrupted Nora; "I meant to tell you about that, mother. Just fancy, when we came to the one of Lord Gresham's grandmother, Lady Violet, they all said I was so like her; and really I think I am—a little."

"How very curious!" said Mrs. Naismith. "I don't remember the picture well, it is so long since I have been through the castle; but I must make a point some of these days of seeing this wonderful likeness."

"Lady Violet," repeated Dr. Naismith, thoughtfully stroking his beard: "she was Colonel Leighton's grandmother also. Perhaps that is why he has taken such a fancy to you. If that is so, it proves that his memory is not altogether lost. Did you go up to the tower and see the view?"

"No, we hadn't time," said Frank, joining in again. "Nora pretended she saw a ghost or something, and insisted on coming home."

"What! more ghosts, Nora? Are you sure it wasn't just another rat?"

"No, mother," replied poor Nora, blushing; "I really thought I saw a shadow in the corridor, and it was so dark and quiet I got a fright."

"She said it was Win Kee," went on Frank contemptuously. "Humphrey and she are always seeing him somewhere."

"Win Kee! What made you think it was he, dear?"

"I—I don't know. It just seemed to me it was like him."

"We searched the corridor and the turret, and there was no one there," continued Frank triumphantly; "and when we biked home at a good pace, we saw Win Kee working in the colonel's garden. So it simply couldn't have been him."

"Hardly; if you bicycled straight back here, you would have been sure to pass him on the way. Had Peter been telling you any more about his wonderful ghost?"

"Yes, he told us where he had seen the first one,

and described the sounds he heard coming from the cellars."

"Aha! I thought that would be the way of it," said Dr. Naismith; "and it explains the mysterious ghost you saw, Nora. It was simply your imagination, stimulated by the semi-darkness and stillness of the empty house. You must not allow yourself to become so nervous, little girl. All the same, I expect some of the others were frightened too, eh?"

"I know I was in a funk," I confessed guiltily.

"Well, well, we are all apt to let our imaginations get the better of us occasionally," said the doctor, smiling; "but I must speak to Peter seriously."

"I think he was in a funk too," said Frank; "he got awfully red and funny, and his voice was quite husky."

"Did he? He'll frighten himself into an apoplectic fit some of these days, silly old fellow. I must go and see him to-morrow.—By-the-bye," continued the doctor, addressing his wife as she rose to leave the table, "I meant to tell you some news I heard from Robinson the banker to-day, but this story about ghosts put it out of my head. It seems that a lot of false notes and coins are being circulated in the neighbourhood just now; and the police are taking up

the matter. I understand that a man from Scotland Yard may be sent down."

"They surely don't suspect any one in or round about Peddlington, do they, John? I am certain all the villagers are honest and respectable."

"I don't know if they suspect any one yet, but you had better be on your guard when you receive change. It would never do to give bad money for birthday presents—eh, Nora?"

"Oh no, father; do look after that money in your study."

"Golly!" exclaimed Frank. "I hope old Martha didn't give me bad coins when I bought these bull's eyes."

He pulled out two or three coppers from his pocket, and examined them with such an air of doubt and dismay that we all burst out laughing.

"I don't think you need worry, my boy," said his father, smiling; "I never heard of coiners issuing false pennies."

CHAPTER VI.

MARTHA'S LODGER.

BOTH Frank and I overslept ourselves next morning, and as we were hurriedly dressing, in a frantic endeavour to make up lost time, we heard the front door bell ring, and immediately afterwards Dr. Naismith called to Tommy, the stable boy, to bring round his gig at once.

"Some one wanting father in a hurry," announced Frank, wrestling with his tie, which had got knotted at the back of his neck. "My word, he must be bad. Look how the pater is making Molly go!"

We watched the dogcart spinning down the avenue and out on to the road towards the village, and then, finishing our toilet, hurried downstairs. Although breakfast had been in for some time, we found that Mrs. Naismith had only just commenced, and immediately we appeared Nora turned to us with a scared face.

"O boys, just fancy!" she exclaimed. "Poor old Peter has had a fit, and father has gone off to see him."

"Peter!" repeated Frank in dismay; "why, he was all right yesterday when we left him. When did it happen?"

"Late last night," replied his mother. "It seems that after you saw him he must have gone down to the village for some reason. At any rate, Bobby, the policeman, met him on the road, and, noticing that he appeared to be ill, persuaded him to go home, and accompanied him to his house. Unfortunately, Bobby, who intended to speak to your father about it, was called away to Carnswaithe in connection with this false coin business, and had to spend the night there. On his way home this morning he looked in at Peter's cottage, which he found empty. Guessing at once that the old man would be up at the castle, he proceeded there, and found the side door open and poor Peter lying unconscious in the billiard-room. How long he had been there it is impossible to say, but Bobby immediately dispatched a neighbour to summon your father, while he himself carried the unconscious man back to his house."

"Isn't it dreadfully sad?" said Nora tearfully; "and

to think that only yesterday he was going about with us all right."

"Yes, it is beastly," responded Frank, seating himself. "Do you think he will die, mother?"

"I hope not; but you must not take it to heart so much, Nora dear. Remember Peter was a very old man, and in the course of nature could not be expected to live many years more. For some time your father has been anxious about him, fearing an apoplectic seizure, such as this appears to be; but, in any case, you are not to blame in any way for what has happened."

"I know, mother, b—but I can't help it," sobbed Nora, fairly breaking down.

Frank appeared equally miserable, and altogether it was the most doleful and silent meal I had partaken of since coming to Ivy Cottage. When it was finished Mrs. Naismith took Nora with her, to occupy her thoughts in some household duties, and we boys were left to ourselves. Unable to settle down to anything, we hung about near the house, awaiting the doctor's return. Bouncer was let off his chain, much to his delight; Donald the pony was visited and petted, and even Nora's despised rabbits and chickens came in for some attention. At last, when there was still no

sign of the dogcart, Frank announced his intention of going down to the village to visit old Martha, and we started along the road. As we descended the hill we met Win Kee carrying some parcels, and rather to my surprise, as we had not spoken to him since the episode near the station, he came up and accosted us.

"Good-morning," he began, touching his cap.

"Good-morning, Win Kee," said Frank, always ready to air his pigeon English. "You hear about old Peter? He very ill; take fit; doctor go to see him."

"I hear," replied the Chinaman, nodding his head, "he very bad? no can talk?"

He asked this anxiously, as though the answer meant much to him, and a look of disappointment crept over his face when Frank shook his head.

"The doctor not back yet. I can't tell you."

The Chinaman touched his cap again and moved on, but it seemed to me that he looked nervous and frightened, and I mentioned the fact to my companion.

"Oh, he's just upset about hearing how bad Peter is," said Frank carelessly. "He was a great favourite with every one. Why should he be frightened?"

"I don't know, but—"

"What on earth is it now?" asked Frank irritably; "every time you meet the poor beggar you seem to find something against him."

"Well, I don't know there is anything against him, but he puzzles me a bit. Do you know, he doesn't speak like what I remember the coolies used to do. His accent is different, more like a Cockney; and the words he uses—I can't exactly explain."

"Oh, rot!" was the contemptuous reply. But further conversation was interrupted by a loud barking behind us, and turning round, we beheld Bouncer making vicious darts at the Chinaman, who was keeping him at bay with difficulty.

"Bouncer!" shouted Frank, "come here, sir;" and as the dog paid no attention to his cries, he ran back and seized him by the collar.

"I don't know what's taken him," panted Frank, as he returned hauling along the unwilling retriever, who kept looking backwards as though he were anxious not to let his quarry escape. "I never knew him fly at Win Kee like that before.—Be quiet, sir."

In this fashion we entered the village, and reached old Martha's shop. Frank was stooping to fasten

his handkerchief to the dog's collar when some one, coming quickly out of the door, nearly tripped over him.

"Hullo! I beg your pardon. Not hurt, I hope? That's a nice retriever you have. What do you call him?"

"Bouncer," said Frank, picking himself up; "he belongs to my sister."

"Bouncer! here, good dog," said the stranger, patting the puppy, who, after a cautious sniff, licked his hand and began wagging his tail.—"Don't tie him up; it spoils a dog's temper."

The speaker, a small, sharp-featured man with a dark beard, kept glancing at us all the time with his keen gray eyes, which somehow seemed to take in every detail of our appearance. After a few more words and a parting pat on the head to Bouncer, he stepped into the street, and, with a quick glance round, started off at a brisk rate.

"I wonder who that cove is," said Frank, looking after him; "I'm sure he's quite a stranger. How he looked at us! Beastly cheek I call it to stare at a chap like that. It gave me quite a creepy feeling, as if I had done something wrong—just what one feels during an interview with the doctor at

Brotherton. Perhaps Martha knows who he is. Come on, and we'll ask her."

We found that old worthy seated behind the counter placidly knitting, while her small assistant lifted down and dusted jars of sweets and stores nearly as big as herself. Martha looked up over her spectacles as we entered, and rose stiffly to her feet.

"Eh, Master Frank, I'm main glad to see you and your friend," she said, laying down her knitting and coming forward. "I hope you are enjoying your holidays."

"Thanks, Martha; we're having quite a decent time. How are you keeping? Any more lodgers since we were here last?"

Etiquette demanded that this stock question should be put before further news was exchanged, but the reply was altogether unexpected and startling.

"Ay, I've got another lodger, Master Frank," said the old dame proudly, "and a real nice gentleman he is. He walked into the shop yesterday evening with a bag in his hand, and says to me quite quiet like, 'I see you take lodgers. I want a room for a week or two. What do you charge?' I was that flustered, me taking him for an ordinary customer

like, that, will you believe me, Master Frank, at first I could say nothing."

The idea of old Martha being at a loss for words was indeed a novel one, and would, in other circumstances, have caused a nine days' wonder in the village.

"‘I live quiet,’ says he, ‘and want rest, having been ill; but if your room is let, why then I must go elsewhere.’ ‘And where else would you stay in Peddlington but with old Martha?’ says I, at that finding my tongue. ‘A bedroom all to yourself, with a parlour to sit in, and all cooking done, is what my last lodger had, and at fifteen shillings a week you are welcome to that.’ Maybe it was only thirteen shillings and sixpence he did pay, now I think on it; but my gentleman never so much as asked another question. ‘That will suit me very well,’ says he, ‘and I’ll pay the first week in advance.’ So in he walks, and a quieter, more respectable gentleman nobody could ask for."

She paused for want of breath, and looked at us to see the effect of her words.

"Another lodger!" gasped Frank in astonishment; 'why, Martha, that is splendid. What sort of a chap is he?'"

"A small, thin gentleman with a white face; but then he has been ill. A touch of 'flenzy I think he said it was. A real gentleman with a beautiful black beard and—"

"A black beard!" exclaimed Frank. "Does he wear a slouch hat with a muffler round his neck?"

"Ay, that he do. 'I have to be careful, Martha,' says he, 'after that touch of 'flenzy.'"

"Why, that is the chap who nearly fell over me at the door just now! I wondered where he came from."

"A country gentleman he is, so he told me, and that pleasant and affable. When I told him about poor Peter this morning at breakfast he spoke so nice, and asked me all about him and the castle. Poor Peter must be mortal bad, Master Frank. I see the doctor driving east this three hours back, and I says to myself, 'Peter's time's come.' Old Martha saw it in his face this while back."

The old dame shook her head solemnly, with a sort of gloomy triumph at the fulfilment of her prophecy, and Frank plied her with questions regarding Peter's seizure, but without eliciting anything further than we already knew. Martha's thoughts were wholly taken up with her new lodger, and

seeing this Frank at length bade her farewell. Having purchased a packet of bull's eyes and routed out Bouncer from under the counter, where he was enjoying titbits secretly offered him by the minute Sally, we took our leave and returned home to lunch. Dr. Naismith had arrived just before us, bringing the sad news that poor old Peter was dead.

"He never recovered consciousness," said the doctor, snatching a hasty meal before starting out on his usual round of visits, "and passed away peacefully an hour ago. Once or twice he muttered something about a 'key' which neither Bobby, the policeman, nor I could catch. Probably the faithful old fellow was dreaming of his duties at the castle; but though Bobby looked through the bunches of keys, not one seemed to be missing."

"Poor old Peter!" said Mrs. Naismith sadly, while we three children sat awed and silent at the thought of death—"poor old Peter! we shall all miss him very much. Had you any uncertainty as to the cause of his illness?"

"None whatever. Apoplexy, without a doubt, and only to be expected in a man of his build and temperament. Now I must be off again, and shan't be in till late."

He stooped to kiss Nora as he passed her chair.

"Don't fret about your old friend, dear," he said, gently stroking her hair; "he suffered no pain. Peter did his appointed work faithfully on earth, and was quite ready to meet his Maker."

With a kindly nod to Frank and myself he passed out of the room, but paused on the threshold to address his wife. "If you can spare me a minute, dear," he said, "there is something I should like to tell you, which I think you had better know."

Mrs. Naismith rose and followed him into the hall, closing the door, and shortly afterwards we heard the gig drive off. All that afternoon Frank moped about the house in a very dejected mood, while Nora stayed with Mrs. Naismith. Left to myself, I assisted in the stables, and when everything there was in spick-and-span order I fell to cutting the grass with the mower. This proved to be hard work, and I had reached the lower part of the lawn, and with head down was shoving away, when a cautious "Hi" reached my ears from the road just over the hedge. Looking up suddenly, I was startled to find myself gazing into Win Kee's inscrutable countenance.

"You can tell how old Peter now?" he asked in

a cautious voice, touching his hat in a perfunctory manner.

"Peter died this morning," I answered, wondering anew at the Chinaman's persistent interest in the old gate-keeper and rather resenting it.

"He no speak?" The man's evident anxiety was revealed by the eager way he blurted out the question.

"No; he never regained consciousness," and at the words an unmistakable look of relief flashed over Win Kee's sombre face. Without further ado he turned on his heel and left me to complete my self-appointed task. What was he driving at I wondered, setting to work again; and what difference did it make to him whether poor old Peter lived or died? The more I puzzled over the matter the more perplexing it appeared, till suddenly my thoughts took another turn. How was it that he had understood me perfectly well, although I had made no attempt to put my words into pigeon English, and how came it that his own speech sounded so unlike that of any coolie I had ever heard? Granted, as Frank pointed out, that Win Kee had now been several years in England and must have picked up much of the language, yet the man spoke in a manner altogether

different from any of his countrymen, and the fact impressed me more every time we met. By the time the lawn had been cut I was no nearer the solution of the problem, and for the time being I gave it up, resolving to broach the subject to the other members of the Sherlock Holmes Society at the first convenient opportunity. But for the present the society appeared to be forgotten. The president, apparently discouraged by the failure of his first efforts, made no reference to future plans, and appeared to be content to drift back into the humble rôle of an ordinary member of society.

Old Peter's funeral was attended by Dr. Naismith and most of the villagers, and life at Ivy Cottage resumed its usual quiet routine, till one day at breakfast the doctor announced his intention of going up to London the same afternoon.

"Dr. Treherne is to read a paper, on a subject in which I am greatly interested, at the College of Physicians this evening," he explained to his wife, "and I should also like to consult my old friend Professor Jefferson with regard to Colonel Leighton. The colonel's condition has caused me some anxiety lately, and occasionally he seems to have glimpses of memory."

"Poor man!" said Mrs. Naismith, "it seems almost cruel to hope that he will ever recover sufficiently to realize the terrible loss he has sustained. Do you expect to be kept in town any time?"

"Not longer than I can help. I hope to catch the 5.30 train to-morrow evening, but there are one or two business matters to be settled which may detain me, and in that case I shall wire. I understand also that somebody's birthday is approaching, and parents in these cases are expected to do their duty—eh, Nora?"

"O father, are you going to get my present?" exclaimed Nora, greatly excited. "What is it to be?"

"Guess," said Dr. Naismith, smiling at his wife. "I'll give you all one guess."

"A writing case," said Nora, after a moment's thought.

"A new bicycle," cried Frank.

"A bee clock," I hazarded.

Dr. Naismith shook his head. "Humphrey is hottest; but you must just wait till the 20th and see. Now, good-bye. I hope you will all behave and not get into mischief or form any more secret societies in my absence."

Frank flushed at the reference to secret societies,

but made no remark, and we followed the gig down the avenue and waved our hats to the doctor as he drove off. We spent the day harvesting in a field close by where the corn was being cut, and Mrs. Naismith joined us there for tea, and we had a jolly time. Frank was unusually silent all the evening, and I could see that he was hatching one of his great schemes. Instead of the usual flow of conversation that I was accustomed to when we retired to our bedroom, he merely grunted in answer to my remarks, and at last I gave it up as a bad job, and jumping into bed soon fell fast asleep.

A wet sponge, skilfully aimed, woke me with a sudden start next morning, and when I had cleared the water out of my eyes, I saw my chum standing by my bedside.

"Hush, Watson," he began, in the tragic tones he adopted when filling the rôle of the great Sherlock—"hush; I have an idea!"

A pillow, well aimed, cut him short; but after a rousing scrimmage we seated ourselves panting on the edge of the bed, and the president proceeded to explain his great idea.

"I've been thinking over our society business," he said, "and I think we went the wrong way about

it last time. Sherlock Holmes never took Mycroft about with him, but only went to her—I mean him—occasionally, just to buck him up a bit; and even Watson was only dragged in at the last, when everything had been discovered.”

This was certainly a new idea to me. Hitherto it had always been my impression that the long-suffering Watson had been ruthlessly forced to accompany the immortal detective on many a fruitless and unnecessary expedition. But Frank was running the society, so I held my tongue and merely nodded.

“You remember that time he was after that dog, the Hound of the Basket—something or another, he went off by himself and lived in a hut and found out all about it. And then the time he turned himself into a beggar and sat in the gutter he found out all about that too, and you see he was always alone. I expect he could think harder by himself; and so I’m going to try his dodge and see if I can’t find out something more about the ghost at the castle. If I don’t, you and Nora—Mycroft, I mean—can have a shot.”

“What are you going to do? You’re not going to live at the castle by yourself surely?”

“Rather not; I’m just going up after breakfast

to look around a bit for clues. If I'm late for lunch, you must put the matter off asking questions about where I am and—by Jove! there's the breakfast bell; we'd better buck up."

The usual frantic dressing scramble ensued, and we tore downstairs, Frank fastening his tie as he went.

"First," he shouted, bursting into the dining-room, where Mrs. Naismith and Nora were already seated at the table.

"Hardly first, Frank," said his mother, kissing him; "you'll have to rise earlier to achieve that distinction. —Good-morning, Humphrey; I'm afraid he's leading you into bad habits."

"Good-morning; I'm afraid it's my fault as much as Frank's. We were talking, and quite forgot the time."

"Well, it is holiday time, and I suppose we shall have to forgive them again, Nora. Boys will be boys."

"I think they are horrid mean things," said Nora indignantly. "When I want to have a nice long sleep in the morning, they come thumping at my door wanting me to play cricket or something, and won't go away till I get up. Humphrey promised

to get up early this morning and help me to move the hutches and give the rabbits a run, and instead of that he is later than ever."

"Whew!" whistled Frank; "so he did. I heard him promise. Why didn't you waken us?"

"I'm awfully sorry," I said lamely; "I forgot all about it."

"I thumped on your door till I was tired, and threw gravel at your window, but you never answered."

"Never mind, Nora," said her mother, smiling; "I'm sure Humphrey will help you with your rabbits this morning if you ask him, and perhaps Frank will assist also."

"I'm going a bicycle ride," announced Frank, glancing at me, "but will be back to lunch. Two are quite enough to prevent these tame fat rabbits going very far. They're overfed."

"They're not," was Nora's indignant reply; "I only give them two cabbages and a lettuce each day."

"And some oatmeal, and tea leaves, and dandelions, and clover, and—"

"Now, Frank, don't tease," interposed Mrs. Naismith; "it is better to overfeed pets a little than

to starve them.—Now, children, if you have finished you can go.—Don't be late for lunch, Frank. Where are you going?"

"Oh, just round about," he answered vaguely as we made a rush for our caps.

Frank's bicycle was not kept in the best condition, but after much oiling and pumping of tyres he started off, and I meekly followed Nora to the scene of our labours. My companion was inclined to be grumpy, and feeling that I had merited her displeasure, I did my best to atone for past misdeeds. The two rabbits, Poacher and Scamp, were set free in the open grass field behind the house, while we set to work cleaning the hutch and removing it to a fresh piece of ground. The wire fencing enclosing the run had next to be taken up and placed in its new position, and by the time this had been accomplished satisfactorily all traces of the late occupants had disappeared.

"Oh, I hope they haven't run away," said Nora anxiously. "Scamp never goes very far, but Poacher is so cunning."

"We'll soon find them," I replied cheerfully. "You take that side of the field and I'll take this, and we can't miss them."

But in this I was mistaken, though after a keen search I noticed Scamp's black ears sticking out of a tuft of grass, and pounced upon him. Poacher was nowhere to be found. Master Scamp having been deposited in his new home, we returned to the hunt again, but scoured the field without success. Things looked serious, and Nora appealed to me to recover her favourite.

"Do find him, Humphrey; he is such a dear. If you find him I'll forgive you for not keeping your promise this morning."

"All right; I'll try," I replied cheerfully; "but he may be a long way off by this time. I say," a brilliant idea striking me, "suppose we get Bouncer to help us. He'll nose him out in no time."

"How clever of you to think of him! Of course he will; but won't he bite Poacher when he finds him?"

"I don't think so. Retrievers carry animals very gently, and Bouncer knows your rabbits. Besides, I'll tie my handkerchief to his collar."

Bouncer was in the wildest spirits at being released from his chain, and it was some time before we could get him to understand what we wanted. Then he set to work sniffing about and wagging his tail, and

at last guided us to the tuft of grass where we had already discovered Scamp.

"Stupid," said Nora, shaking her head; "we've found Scamp. Seek Poacher."

With a short bark, as much as to say "Oh, I know what you want now," Bouncer began his sniffing again, and soon struck another trail. Panting and straining at his collar, he led us to the fence and over it into the field where the corn was lying cut. Backwards and forwards he dragged me before setting off again right across the field to the heathland behind Colonel Leighton's house. Here he appeared at fault for an instant, but darting suddenly forward, he thrust his head between two large stones, and reappeared with the truant struggling in his mouth.

"Drop him, Bouncer; don't hurt him," cried Nora, and the obedient dog obeyed at once.

The wily Poacher, finding himself once more at liberty, gave a jump and a kick, as though to see that no bones were broken, and was making off again when his mistress pounced upon him.

"You naughty creature," she exclaimed, giving the rabbit a shake, to which he replied by biting her finger, "you'll never be allowed to have a run again, and Scamp will get all the nicest lettuces."

Seeing that his services were no longer required, Bouncer returned to the place where he had discovered Poacher, and commenced scraping with his paws.

"What is he doing now?" asked Nora; "perhaps he expects to find another rabbit."

Calling off the dog, I peered between the two stones.

"Why, it is a great big hole," I said in surprise, thrusting my arm in; "it seems to go down ever so far."

"Oh, well, never mind," returned Nora indifferently. "It's a good thing we found Poacher before he got down into it. Hold him for me till I get over the fence."

By the time we deposited the rabbit in his hutch and chained up the retriever it was one o'clock, and as we hurried into the house we met Frank at the door.

"I've found out something," he whispered excitedly to me, jumping off his bicycle, "and will report to the society in the summer house."

The summer house was a favourite resort of ours, and thither, after lunch was over, the members of the society wended their way.

"I say," began the president at once, too impatient

to attempt any formal opening of the meeting—"I say I believe I've found the ghost. It's—well, wait till I tell you, and then you can guess."

With this incoherent statement he proceeded to narrate how he had slipped through the gates of the avenue, left the bicycle concealed, and then worked his way stealthily up to the castle. Here, as he had anticipated, he found the little window over the corridor unlatched, and with some difficulty had scrambled up and squeezed his way through. Once inside, he had followed out his favourite theory of crawling about looking for clues, but had discovered nothing even in the haunted turret to which he had the hardihood to make his way. While engrossed in this proceeding he had got a great fright by hearing the little side door which Peter used suddenly opened.

"I scuttled into the picture gallery as quick as I could, and hid behind a curtain in one of the windows. Some one came through the billiard-room, along the corridor, and my word I was frightened when I heard the steps coming towards me!"

"O Frank, how dreadful!" said Nora.

"Yes, it was much worse being alone," confessed Sherlock. "But I heard the person turn down the

little passage into the turret, and after a little I crept out to see what he was doing."

"Oh, how could you?" whispered Mycroft, shivering.

"It was the only way to discover a clue," returned the president loftily, "and it was rather fun. I crept on hands and knees along the passage and peeped round the corner. A man was kneeling in the turret examining the stone floor, and I watched him without him knowing it. After a while he seemed to find some mark, for he stared at it for quite a long time, and then suddenly put his ear down and listened. You know how quiet it is in the castle," went on Sherlock, "and there wasn't a sound to be heard; but all at once there came a sort of clinking sound from under the turret, very faint and muffled, but quite distinct."

Nora drew in her breath, and we both listened eagerly to what was to follow.

"The man on the floor seemed delighted at the sound, for he sat up and rubbed his hands together; but I—I—something must have moved, for he turned round suddenly in my direction, and I had only just time to duck. I was afraid he might come along to see what the noise was, so I crawled into the corridor and along to the billiard-room, and then

bunked through the open door. When I got outside I sprinted for my bicycle, and came straight home and met you at the door. And so I've got a clue at last, and—"

"But who was it?" asked Nora—"who was it?"

"Guess," said Frank, jumping up in his excitement.

"Win Kee," cried Nora at once.

"A tramp."

"Wrong—both of you wrong. It was—it was Martha's new lodger!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE GOLD LOCKET.

“**O**LD Martha’s lodger,” repeated Frank, gazing at us as though to note the effect of this wonderful discovery.

“Oh,” said Mycroft, after a pause during which we all sat staring at one another in silence. The president’s announcement, indeed, had fallen rather flat. After his thrilling adventures and the breathless pitch of expectancy to which we had been worked up, we had expected something more sensational, and our looks must have expressed our disappointment. Sherlock was quick to note and resent the fact.

“Oh, if that’s all you’ve got to say about it,” he exclaimed indignantly, “what’s the use of me taking the trouble to get up the society and discover all sorts of things? It is beastly mean, and I won’t tell you anything more.”

This made us feel uncomfortable, and I hastened to rectify our mistake.

"Martha's lodger! Do you mean that little chap who nearly fell over you the last time we were in the village?"

"He's not so very little. He's nearly as tall as father, and," lowering his voice to a whisper, the speaker added, "I think he carries a revolver."

"A pistol!" exclaimed Mycroft, who was terrified at the thought of firearms; "he might have shot you."

"I expected a shot every minute," responded the president, nodding his head significantly. "He is evidently a desperate villain; but now we—I—have found him out, we can watch him and be on our guard."

I could not imagine the quiet, inoffensive stranger we had spoken to as a desperate character, nor did it seem very plain what we were to guard against.

"Do you think he will try to murder us?" asked Nora, in an awed tone. "Don't you think we ought to tell father, Frank?"

"Murder us? Rubbish!" replied Frank, quite mollified at the effect he had produced; "he's only dangerous when he's—when he's—well, when some one tracks him as I did this afternoon."

"But don't you think we ought to tell Bobby? Think of old Martha having such a lodger!"

"There's no need to tell anybody," asserted Frank. "Remember you promised to keep everything secret when you joined, and it's an awful thing to break your oath to a society. You might be expelled. Besides, I mean to dog the fellow myself and find out all he's up to, and then we'll tell Bobby to catch him, and everybody will thank us, and it will all appear in the papers."

This blissful prospect evidently did not appeal much to Nora, but the thought of her promise weighed heavily on her, and to be expelled sounded dreadful. She made a half-hearted appeal to the president to speak out himself, but he was obdurate.

"Oh, rot," he said; "the society was founded to hunt ghosts and robbers and all that sort of thing, and now the fun is beginning. You want to go and spoil it. No, you promised. Hullo! There's a telegram. Bet it's from father."

Without waiting to adjourn the meeting he dashed down into the road, seized the yellow envelope from the telegraph boy, and sped into the house. In a minute he reappeared waving his cap and shouting, "Hurrah! It's all right. He's coming down to-

night. Mother is going to drive to the station in the pony cart, and we can bicycle down with her. Hurrah !”

This prospect banished for a time all further thoughts of Martha’s “desperate” lodger, and a rush was made for the outhouse where the bicycles were stored. Our various “mounts” were overhauled and brought round to the porch ready for a start. Tea was hurried through in spite of Mrs. Naismith’s laughing protests that there was plenty of time, and then Frank and I went to the stables to assist in harnessing Donald. This proved rather a difficult task, as the pony was more expert at the business than we were ; but at last everything was adjusted, and we all started down the avenue. As we turned into the village I noticed Nora suddenly swerve as if she were going to fall, and then pedal close up to the pony trap. Next moment I understood the reason, for looking down the street ahead I noticed Martha’s lodger standing at the door of the shop. He nodded pleasantly to Frank and me as we passed, and Mrs. Naismith asked us who he was, adding, “Take care, Nora dear ; you will come against the wheel of the cart. Why are you riding so close ?”

Nora moved farther off without a word, and Frank

answered with rather a conscious look, "That is old Martha's new lodger." Mrs. Naismith seemed interested. "Oh, is it?" she replied in a different tone, at the same time taking a quick glance at the stranger.

The station was reached in good time, and the train duly deposited Dr. Naismith on the platform. After the usual salutations he took his seat in the pony cart along with his wife, and his bag was handed in by the porter.

"There are some very precious parcels in here," said Dr. Naismith significantly, tapping the bag and nodding at Nora; "I shouldn't wonder if one or two appeared on your plate to-morrow at breakfast." Tipping the porter, he gave Donald a touch with the whip, and away we all went dashing up the long hill. As we passed through the village Mrs. Naismith said something to her husband, and he looked across at old Martha's shop. The stranger, however, had disappeared. Coming up to the post-office I jumped off my machine and ran in to see if there were any letters for me. Some days before I had written to my aunt asking her to buy me a present for Nora's birthday, and I fully expected to receive the parcel by the afternoon mail. In this, however, I was dis-

appointed. There was nothing for me. Win Kee was at the counter collecting Colonel Leighton's letters, and he gave me a surly salute. Martha's lodger was there too, chatting gaily with the young woman who sorted the letters, and without any appearance of curiosity, his quick eyes seemed to take in all that was going on.

There was still a chance that my present would come by the early morning post, so I said nothing of my disappointment to Frank, and resolved to hope for the best. The usual picnic along the coast had been arranged to celebrate Nora's birthday, and as there was a long day's outing before us we went early to bed that night, and I for one slept like a top.

The brilliant sunshine streaming through the blind wakened us betimes next morning, and Frank was early astir, rushing about in much excitement.

"Come on, Humphrey; let's get dressed and go down and see all the presents," he exclaimed, jumping out of bed; "they are always put on our plates at breakfast, and we are not supposed to touch them till every one is down. What are you giving? Father got me a jolly picture post-card album in London."

"My aunt was to send me a present, but it hasn't come yet. I hope it will arrive this morning."

"Oh, of course it will. Hurry up, man, or Nora will bag the bath first. Come along."

After a hasty splash and scrub we returned to dress, Frank banging Nora's door as we passed.

"Many happy returns," he yelled. "Get up, Lazy-bones."

Jumping into our flannels we hurried downstairs, and to my intense disappointment discovered that no parcel had come for me.

"Never mind, old chap," said Frank consolingly; "it can't be helped, and perhaps it will be here by the time we get back from the picnic. My eye! what a lot of presents she's got."

We spent some time looking at the various parcels and speculating on the donors, and while engaged in this occupation Nora came downstairs, and was received by Frank with boisterous effusion.

"Many happy returns," he shouted, tugging her hair; "one, two, three—look, what a pile of presents!—four, five—"

"Steady, Frank; that's enough," said Dr. Naismith, entering with his wife.—"Well, Nora, do you feel dreadfully old?"

"Oh no, not a bit," she replied, jumping into his arms.

"Many happy returns of the day, dear," said Mrs. Naismith, kissing her tenderly. "Now, come and look at your presents, or we shall never get begun to breakfast."

One by one the various parcels were taken out of their wrappings, amidst exclamations of surprise and astonishment. A neat little handbag from Colonel Leighton came in for much admiration, as did the post-card album from Frank; but when the last neat little packet was unrolled, disclosing a tiny gold watch in its velvet case, Nora's delight knew no bounds.

"Oh, how lovely!" she cried, lifting it out carefully. "This is what you brought from London yesterday. How *did* you guess I wanted a dear little watch like this?"

"Golly," said Frank, "what a ripper! It's got a second hand, too!"

"Oh, it's just too delicious," repeated Nora. "Thank you all so much for your presents."

"I'm awfully sorry mine has not come," I said awkwardly; "my aunt was to send a collar for Bouncer."

"Never mind, Humphrey," said Mrs. Naismith kindly; "it was very nice of you to think of it.—"

Come along now, children, and begin your breakfast."

Nora and Frank were too excited to eat much, and whenever permission was given we rushed off to get ready for the picnic. Happening to return to the dining-room for something Nora had left there, I heard Dr. Naismith say something about "a very serious matter." He held a letter in his hand to which he was evidently referring; but nothing more was said while I was present, and soon afterwards the pony cart came round to the door, and we all started in great spirits.

It was a glorious morning, and from the road which ran along the cliffs past Cliffden we had a splendid view of the sea lying blue and sparkling far below, with fishing boats and steamers dotted here and there. It was the first time I had been any distance in this direction, but Nora and Frank knew the road well, and tore along on their bicycles, with Donald trotting behind. Bouncer, too, was out for a holiday, and scampered backwards and forwards, enjoying himself thoroughly. From the rocks below Cliffden the point we were making for had seemed no distance, but the road wound in and out, following the coast line, and we must have gone fifteen miles

before reaching a small farmhouse where we all dismounted. Donald was unharnessed and put into the stables, and our bicycles were left in a shed. The farmer gave us a hearty welcome, and offered to carry the hamper down to the rocks, but Dr. Naismith would not hear of it.

“Not a bit of it, Tregellis,” he said. “I know you are busy cutting, and I’m not going to waste your time. The boys will help me to carry it down, and no doubt they will take care that it is light to bring up.—Now then, Frank, you take one end, and Humphrey will relieve you when you’re tired.”

So saying, he lifted one end of the basket himself, and we started off, Mrs. Naismith and Nora leading the way. The path led zigzag down the face of the cliff, and it was not long before Frank owned himself beaten, and I took his place. Slipping and scrambling, the hamper was at length safely deposited on the rocks, where Mrs. Naismith and Nora had already selected a spot convenient for laying out the eatables.

“Well done, boys!” exclaimed Dr. Naismith, sitting down and moping his brow; “you have fairly earned your dinner, and we may leave the rest to the ladies. When we have cooled down a little we can

go round the point and have a dip. Did you remember the towels?"

"Here they are," said Nora. "I brought them myself. Frank always forgets."

"Good girl," said the doctor; "be sure and have everything ready for us when we get back. We shall be as hungry as hawks.—Come along, boys."

He led the way round the point to a place where there was a short stretch of clean, crisp sand, and in a few minutes we were disporting ourselves in the cool, refreshing sea. Frank and I were both quite at home in the water, and after giving us a few lessons in diving, Dr. Naismith, who was a splendid swimmer, took a turn out to sea, and on his return we came ashore again and jumped into our clothes. The ladies had been busy during our absence, and a tempting repast was set out in the shade under the cliff. Our bathe had given us sharp appetites, and we set to with a will, and did justice to ourselves and the provisions. Nora's health was enthusiastically drunk in ginger beer and lemonade, but she refused to respond to the cries of "Speech."

"Quite right, my dear," said Mrs. Naismith, smiling; "ladies are not expected to reply when their health is drunk. A gentleman usually does it for

them. Perhaps Humphrey will respond, if you ask him."

"Humphrey!" exclaimed Nora scornfully; "why, he's no use at talking. He hardly ever opens his mouth!"

"Ha, ha! there's one for you, Humphrey," laughed Dr. Naismith; "but, upon my word, I don't know that it isn't a compliment. However, we'll spare your blushes this time. When Frank has finished his fifth tart—"

"It's only my fourth."

"Dear me! is that all? Well, when you are done, I think we might show Humphrey the smuggler's cave.—Did you bring candles, dear?"

"Yes; Jane remembered them at the last minute," replied Mrs. Naismith.

"Come along, then," said the doctor, rising. "Not so long ago," he explained to me as we followed him over the rocks, "this part of the coast was a favourite haunt of smugglers, and many were the encounters between them and the revenue officers. This is the largest cave hereabouts. There is a smaller one ten miles farther south, and there is a tradition that still another exists opposite Cliffden which connected Fareham Castle with the sea. No trace of it, however,

has ever been found, though there is no doubt that an ancestor of the present Lord Gresham was strongly suspected of harbouring smugglers and profiting by their trade. He certainly amassed a most amazing fortune, but nothing could be proved against him. Here we are. Now then, will you show us the way in?"

I gazed at him in astonishment to see if he was joking, and the others burst out laughing at my puzzled looks. In front of us the unbroken cliff seemed to reach up for one hundred feet or so without an opening.

"Do you see that ledge up there?" went on Dr. Naismith, pointing to a small crack which appeared about ten feet from the ground; "that is the entrance. From where we stand the opening is concealed by a sharp ridge of rock, but at high tide a man can step from a boat right into the cave. I'll lift you up, and you will soon see for yourself."

Grasping the sharp ledge I pulled myself up, and could not refrain from a cry of astonishment. It was indeed as he said: there was a hollow concealed by the jutting rock, and I dropped down into it before I knew where I was. Nora was hoisted up next, then came Frank, and lastly Dr. Naismith himself,

his wife preferring to wait for our return, with Bouncer for company. Frank led the way, crawling on his knees for a short distance; but the rock above us soon lifted, and we were able to stand upright. The candles were produced, and after our eyes had become accustomed to the flickering light I perceived that we were in a large, roomy cave with rough-hewn shelves running round on either side. The further end sloped upwards, but if there had ever been an outlet in that direction, it had long ago been closed by a subsidence of soil. We explored the cave thoroughly, the shadows thrown by the light dancing weirdly on the damp walls, and Frank whispered to me that it was an ideal spot to hold meetings of "The Society." His words echoing mysteriously round the rocks reached his father's ears, and he laughed.

"The 'society' who frequented this place were a rough lot," he said, "and would have given you short shrift if you had been caught spying. We'd better leave the cave now; there is nothing more to be seen. The candles are burning low, and your mother will be wondering what has become of us."

We crawled back through the short tunnel and scrambled down the rock, our eyes blinking with the sudden glare of the sun.

"Well, what do you think of the smuggler's cave, Humphrey?" asked Mrs. Naismith.

"It is splendid," I said, gazing at the hidden entrance. "What fun it would be to discover the one near Cliffden!"

"I'm afraid that is unlikely," she replied, smiling; "but we ought to be thankful that we have no troublesome and dangerous smugglers nowadays. I must go back and start the fire for the tea. What are you children going to do?"

"I want to show Humphrey where I was found," said Nora, colouring.

"Very well," said Dr. Naismith; "go and amuse yourselves as you like. The tide is still going out, and there is no fear of you being caught. I'll have a quiet pipe, and call you when tea is ready."

Accordingly I followed Frank and Nora over the wet slippery rocks until we came to a pool far out from which the tide was just receding.

"There," said Nora, pointing downwards; "that is where I was washed ashore and found by the fishermen. The spar I was lashed to was fixed between the rocks, and this had saved me from being dashed to pieces. It is so queer to think of it all, and that the baby was me."

"Yes, it must be," I replied, in imagination calling up the wild scene, the wind howling and driving on the cruel waves to snatch the poor little baby from safety. "Were there no pieces of wreckage near by which would have given some clue to the ship?"

"The whole coast was littered with wreckage," said Frank; "the storm rose so suddenly that lots of little boats were caught and were never heard of again."

"The broken gold chain is all that may lead to a clue, and where can one look for a clue in the sea?"

"But perhaps something might be found on the shore, or even in this pool," I suggested.

"Oh, rot," said Frank, in his rude, cheery indifference; "it's no use looking, after all this time. Besides, look what an A1 brother Nora has at present."

"I'm not objecting to my brother," said Nora "but surely the Sherlock Holmes Society ought to find out my clues as well as the stupid ghosts at Fareham Castle."

"Oh, that's quite different," explained the president; "you're—eh—you're—whew, what a thumping big crab!" he broke off, looking round for something to throw at it. The tide had now left the pool, and its surface being smooth and unrippled we could see

right to the bottom through the clear water. A great crab had crawled out of the fissure in which Nora's spar had been caught, and was exciting Frank's sporting instincts. In a shallow pool near at hand he discovered several small pieces of rock, and it was the work of a moment to seize one and fling it at his quarry.

"O you wretch!" cried Nora, starting back as the water splashed up all around us. "You've wet all my new frock."

"Never mind; I nearly got him," cried Frank, picking up another stone; "he will make a splendid crab pie. Watch." The second missile was no better aimed than the first, and served merely to awaken the crab to a sense of danger. He retired sideways to a bunch of seaweed and disappeared from view.

"I must have another go at him," said Frank. "Keep an eye on him, Humphrey, in case he scuttles while I'm gathering ammunition."

"Hurry up then, boys," said Nora; "there's father calling. I won't wait for you."

I felt inclined to follow her, not being interested in the crab hunt, when a movement in the pool attracted my attention. The crab was evidently burrowing in

his hiding-place, and owing to his exertions the seaweed was violently agitated, and a curious-looking object which glinted was disclosed to view. I stooped to get a better look at it. "Look out," panted Frank; "it's slipping," and before I could say a word the large rock he was carrying fell with a splash into the pool.

"Sorry," he said, as the water, splashing up, drenched me pretty thoroughly; "it slipped out of my hands."

"If you had only waited a moment I would have got it."

"Oh, never mind," he replied indifferently; "it must have got away by this time. Come on to tea."

"I'm not talking about the crab; there's something else—" But Frank had already set off, and merely waved his hand in reply.

Waiting till the commotion caused by the rock had subsided, I looked eagerly down into the pool. Yes, there it was, something round and yellow, evidently entangled in the seaweed. My heart beat fast with excitement. Could it be the clue Nora was so anxious to discover? I looked round for a stick or piece of wood to help me, but there was none. Lying down on the rock and leaning over, I next

tried to reach the seaweed, but the water was too deep. Again and again I tried, but all to no purpose. There was only one thing for it, and I could hardly be wetter than I was. Kicking off my shoes I stepped quietly into the water until I stood over the object which had attracted my attention. Then stooping, I felt gently with my hand, and grasped something cold and round. My head was only just above the surface, and in that position it was impossible to exert much force; but at length a handful of seaweed gave way, and I scrambled on to the rocks with my prize. A locket—a small gold locket with a bit of gold chain attached! The seaweed clung round it, and in the centre a limpet was fastened.

“Hullo, Humphrey; mother sent me— Why, what have you been doing? Did you fall in?”

In my excitement over the discovery I had not noticed Nora’s approach till she was beside me.

“No, I did not fall in. Here is a birthday present for you. I found it in the pool.”

“Seaweed,” said Nora, looking at what I held out in my hand. “Oh, a gold locket, and you found it in *my* pool! You are a dear, Humphrey,” and to my embarrassment, wet as I was, she flung her arms round me in an affectionate and grateful embrace.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE SOCIETY GAINS A RECRUIT.

"HULLO, Humphrey, you're dripping! What has happened?"

"He's been in the water, father; and just look what he's found," exclaimed Nora excitedly. "I'm sure it's a clue."

"A clue! A clue to what?" asked Dr. Naismith in bewilderment, gazing from one to the other.

"A clue to me," cried Nora, holding out her hand. "Look, it's a real gold locket and chain, and I'm sure the chain is a bit of the one at home. You know—the one that was round me when I was washed ashore."

"How wonderful! Can it be possible?" said Mrs. Naismith, gazing at the tarnished locket. "The chain is indeed very like the other. Where did you find it?"

"In the pool Nora showed me. It was buried
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amongst the seaweed at the bottom, but the crab Frank was shying stones at happened to turn it up."

"Very strange," said the doctor, "and a most extraordinary coincidence. We shall soon find out when we get home whether this is a bit of the other chain. But in the meantime, Humphrey, you must not catch cold. I don't think salt water will do you much harm in this warm weather, but there is no use running risks. Take a good drink of hot tea and keep moving. When you have had something to eat we had better pack up and be off, and the moment you get home you must change every stitch of clothing."

While I drank my tea the others examined the locket, and Frank was inclined to claim a share in its discovery.

"It was my crab that found it," he declared, "and it was I who saw the crab, so—"

"It was Humphrey who found it," protested Nora, "and he gave it to me. He promised when he joined the soc—I mean, he promised to help me to find a clue."

"Oh, did he?" said Dr. Naismith, laughing. "So acting is better than talking, eh? But look here; I have managed to dislodge the limpet at last."

He held out the locket as he spoke, and showed us a small amethyst set in the centre.

"I feel sure it opens," he went on, turning it over in his hand, "but I don't see how. A jeweller will no doubt manage it without damage. Don't be too hopeful, Nora dear, lest you should be disappointed with the result. Put it away carefully now till we get home. There, now, be off. Sixpence to the one who gets to Ivy Cottage first.—Humphrey, if you haven't changed by the time we get back with Donald, I'll—I'll give you a dose of medicine!"

Almost before the words were out of his mouth we were off, scrambling up the steep path. The other two far outstripped me at climbing, and by the time I arrived, panting and breathless, at the top of the cliff they had mounted their bicycles, and were just disappearing round a bend in the road with Bouncer galloping alongside. I was soon in hot pursuit, but it was not until several miles had been covered that I came up with Nora and slowed down to keep her company.

"Go on," she panted. "Frank is not far ahead."

"There is no hurry," I said. "Donald must be a long way behind."

"Please go on," she answered; and then, as I paid

no heed, she suddenly jumped off her machine. "If you don't go on and catch Frank I'll wait here till the pony cart comes up, and then you'll be scolded for not hurrying home to change."

"But I meant to go on with you," I began in surprise.

"I don't want you," she answered promptly. "Bouncer always stays with me. Don't be silly, Humphrey. You always let Frank beat you, and I think it is very stupid of you."

Such an idea had not occurred to me, but seeing that she really meant what she said, I set off after Frank, and soon came in sight of him freewheeling down a hill. Happening to look round he caught sight of me, and next minute his head was down, and he was pedalling for all he was worth. Gradually I overhauled him, and just before Cliffden was reached I passed him and swerved into the avenue, almost colliding with a man who was walking towards the house. Leaving my bicycle in the porch I ran upstairs to change. A minute afterwards Frank followed and burst into the room.

"I say, did you see him?" he asked breathlessly.

"See who?" I asked in astonishment.

"That fellow in the avenue. It's Martha's lodger!

There! He's ringing the bell now. Perhaps he's come to rob the house."

"Oh, rubbish. He would never walk up to the front door like that."

"I don't know that," replied Frank. "He's mighty cute, I tell you, and may expect to throw us off our guard. I'll keep an eye on him and warn father."

He stole on tiptoe out of the room and crept downstairs just as the shutting of a door announced that the stranger had been ushered into the study. I did not share Frank's opinion with regard to Martha's lodger, thinking rather that he had come merely to consult the doctor; but, all the same, my curiosity was excited, and I hastened to dress with all speed. Needless to say, the result was as it usually is in such cases, and by the time I had hunted for and discovered my collar stud in the soap tray, the pony cart had driven up to the door, and a minute later I heard Dr. Naismith enter the study and close the door.

"I'm glad to see you have changed at once, Humphrey," said Mrs. Naismith, as I met her on the stairs. "I hear you won the sixpence. That doesn't sound as if you were any the worse for the ducking."

"Oh, I'm all right, thanks," I replied. "Did you meet Nora on the way?"

"Yes; we overtook her and came all together. She is very much excited over the locket you found, and wants to compare the broken chain with the piece I have in my jewel case. I really do think they are one and the same, but cannot see how that is going to establish her identity. However, we shall see."

I found Nora and Frank putting away their bicycles, and the latter turned to me at once.

"The pater wouldn't listen to me," he exclaimed in an aggrieved tone. "I told him there was a desperate burglar in the study, but when he heard who it was he only laughed and said it was all right."

"What should we do?" said Nora. "I wish we had told them before what a dreadful man Martha's lodger really was."

"I don't think he will do any harm," I replied confidently. "Dr. Naismith is much bigger, and could easily lick him in a fight."

"But the pistols—Frank said he had pistols."

"I didn't actually *see* his revolver," admitted Sherlock reluctantly; "I only thought he would be sure to have one. All burglars do."

Further conversation on the subject was interrupted by the advent of Jane the housemaid, who announced that Frank and I were "wanted" in the study.

"That's rum," ejaculated my chum, gazing at me in surprise. "What can they want with us, I wonder? Perhaps the fellow is going to confess, and the pater needs us as witnesses. What a lark! Come on."

I followed him indoors, while Nora ran off to find her mother and settle the question of the broken chain. In answer to our knock Dr. Naismith called to us to come in, and we found ourselves once more confronting the "burglar."

"Ah, here you are. Shut the door, Frank.—Now then," the doctor continued, turning to his visitor, "shall I explain the whole story to them, or would you prefer to question them yourself?"

"You had better explain matters first," replied the other, smiling and nodding to us in a friendly fashion.

"Very well.—Now then, boys, listen to me. This is Inspector Melvin, a detective from Scotland Yard, who has come down here to make some investigations.—By-the-bye, Frank, what did you mean just now, when I came in, by that extraordinary statement about a burglar?"

Poor Frank grew scarlet, and he shifted uneasily from one foot to the other. It was a sad blow to learn that he had been on a false scent all along, and the fact that his supposed burglar was in reality a detective made matters even worse. Before he could stammer out any explanation, however, the stranger came to his rescue.

"That is a little secret between your son and myself, doctor," he said, smiling, "for which I am partly to blame. It was a very natural mistake for an amateur."

"Well, if you know all about it that is all right," said Dr. Naismith.—"As I was saying, Inspector Melvin has come down here to make some investigations, and you may be able to help him. This morning I had a letter from London stating that the notes with which I paid for Nora's watch were found to be counterfeit, and that a detective would call upon me with regard to the matter. I had heard from the bank here who Martha's new lodger was, and was expecting a visit."

He paused a moment, and I fell to wondering how we were to help this trained sleuth-hound of the law.

"On talking over the circumstances with the inspector," resumed the doctor, "I recollected that the

false notes had been part of the thirty pounds which I put in this desk. Now you remember the first night of your holidays there was some scare, raised by Nora I think, about noises in this room, and you, Humphrey, stated that you saw Colonel Leighton's Chinese servant, Win Kee, crossing the lawn. Inspector Melvin thinks there may possibly be something in the story after all, seeing that the notes have proved to be false. I do not wish to question Nora at present, as she is excited enough about this locket, but I want you to assist the inspector in every way by answering any questions he may put to you."

We both signified our readiness to do so, and the detective asked me to relate in my own words the whole story from beginning to end. When I had finished he sat for a few minutes thinking in silence.

"You say that the Chinaman was coming towards the house and going slowly as though looking for something?" he asked at last.

"Yes."

"You have no idea what he was looking for?"

"No."

"We found him looking for a letter next day on

the road to the station," interjected Frank, who thereupon proceeded to describe our meeting with the Chinaman.

"That letter might possibly afford a clue," said the inspector thoughtfully. Then he turned to me again. "Now, about your search in this room next day. You found the money all right?"

"Yes. Mrs. Naismith counted it, and said it was right; but—"

"But what?" said the doctor as I paused. "I understood that everything was in its place."

"We thought so at the time," I replied; "but when you were told that the money was found in the second top drawer on the right, you said there must be a mistake, as you always kept your cash and bank book in the top left drawer."

"That is quite true," said Dr. Naismith, looking across at the detective, who jotted the fact down in his notebook.

"Did you notice anything else about the room, either of you?"

"No," said Frank at once.

"I found a match in the fireplace," I said rather timidly, fearing lest the statement should provoke an outburst of laughter.

"What sort of a match?"

"A wax vesta. Jane the housemaid uses safety matches."

"Do you use vestas?" the inspector asked Dr. Naismith.

"No."

Again the inspector bent over his notebook, but looked up at my next statement.

"I found another wax vesta in the turret at Fareham Castle."

"You did? When was that?" he asked eagerly.

I hesitated, and then like a flash it came into my mind that it was the day we had signed the Rules of the Sherlock Holmes Society, and the copy of these rules was in the pocket of the very jacket I was wearing. I pulled out the paper and read the date at the top.

"Very good," commented the detective. "What paper was that you consulted?"

I hesitated and glanced at Frank. He had evidently no idea what it was, and whispered to me to go on.

"It's—it's only the rules of a secret society that we drew up that day," I stammered lamely.

"Aha! that wonderful secret society again," said

Dr. Naismith, laughing. "I don't know what Inspector Melvin will have to say to this."

"I must hear what its aim and object is first," replied the inspector, smiling. "What is it called?"

"The Sherlock Holmes Society. Frank is Sherlock."

"And you?"

"I am Dr. Watson."

"You ought to be Mycroft."

"Nora is Mycroft," said Frank, very red in the face.

"Your sister? Quite a select society. Might I see the rules?"

I handed over the paper, which the inspector glanced over.

"Ah! I think I understand now," he said, glancing at Frank with an amused smile. "It seems an innocent if useful society. Hullo!"

We all looked up quickly at the change of tone as he made the exclamation. By chance he had turned the paper over, and something written on the back had arrested his attention.

"Where did you get this?" he asked sharply.

"I found it in Humphrey's pocket," replied Frank.

"It was amongst a lot of exercises and notes."

"Then how comes this writing on it?"

I glanced at the paper he held out and read, "Ware beeks. The cap. wants oof," in sprawling capitals.

"I don't know how that got there," I said. "You remember, Frank, I asked you about it when we signed the rules."

Frank nodded.

"Try and think how it came into your possession," said the detective quietly, though it was evident that he regarded the point as very important. "Your chum found it in your pocket. Do you remember putting any papers there after you left school?"

"No," I answered slowly. "I have not worn this suit till to-day. Mrs. Naismith told me to wear flannels or any old things, as we were in the country."

"Yes," agreed Dr. Naismith; "good clothes wouldn't last you long here."

"That makes it all the easier," said Inspector Melvin. "You must have picked up this paper somewhere the day you travelled down."

The phrase "picked up" brought to my memory the difficulty about my ticket the day we arrived, and the papers the porter handed me.

"I did drop some papers at the station in giving my ticket to the porter," I said rather doubtfully, "and he picked them up and handed them to me, but—"

"I think we have got at it now," said Mr. Melvin quietly, as he closed his notebook and rose to his feet. "I need hardly ask you, doctor, not to say a word to any one except your wife about this business.—And as to you boys, suppose you let me join the Sherlock Holmes Society, and we'll help one another?"

The offer seemed too good to be true. A real live detective from Scotland Yard! We stared at the speaker, who appeared much amused at our embarrassment.

"It is a bargain, then, eh? If you find any likely 'clues,' I shall be glad to hear about them; and if I come across the track of any ghosts, I'll let you know. How will that do?"

"Ripping," said Frank, finding his tongue at last; "but we must tell Nora."

"Mycroft? Certainly Mycroft must know. By-the-bye, who shall I be? Inspector Blunt, of course."

"He was rather a rotter," said Frank doubtfully.

"Well, you know, we police officers are great bunglers compared to Sherlock Holmes with his

scientific methods, and you mustn't expect too much from me. Good-night. I'll keep the rules to study them, if you don't mind," and the detective took his leave with a parting word to Dr. Naismith at the door.

"So that was the meaning of your secret society," said the latter, smiling on his return. "Mr. Melvin thinks you have done very well for beginners, and your information may prove very useful to him."

"We know more about him than he thinks," exclaimed Frank triumphantly. "I watched him looking for clues in Fareham Castle, and he never found me out."

"Are you sure of that?" replied his father, with a sly glance at me. "He hinted at something of the sort to me just now, and remarked that the presence of a bicycle generally meant that the owner was not very far off."

"But I hid my bike," protested the crestfallen Sherlock, and was going on to explain how he had done it, when the door flew open and in dashed Nora.

"It's the same, boys, it's the same!" she exclaimed, waving the chain in her hand.

"Gently, gently, Nora," said Mrs. Naismith, who had followed her.—"The chain is certainly part of

the one found on the child when she came ashore," she continued, addressing her husband; "the links are identical."

"It is very wonderful," said Dr. Naismith, examining the chain very carefully, "but, as you say, there is little doubt that it was all originally one piece. Now that the locket has been cleaned, I can distinctly see a mark round the rim showing that it opens, but there seems to be some secret catch which holds it together."

"Oh, do try and open it," cried Nora.

"I have tried but failed. You must just have patience until I take it to a jeweller. It would be a pity to damage the locket by using force."

"Do take it to-morrow," urged Nora.

"I'm afraid I can't promise that; but the day after I might find time to run up to town again. Now I must go over to Cliffden and see Colonel Leighton.—He has not been very well this last little while," the doctor explained to his wife. "The trouble seems more mental than physical, and Jefferson was much interested in his case when he heard about it.—Shall I thank the colonel for his birthday present, Nora?"

"Please do, father. I haven't seen him for a long time now—ever since the holidays began."

“No, you’ve been too much occupied lately with other things; but a visit might cheer him up a bit. Good-night. Don’t stay up late. You’ve had a long, exciting day, and Frank and Humphrey have another piece of news for you. Ask them who they have got to join the Sherlock Holmes Society.”

CHAPTER IX.

I MAKE A DISCOVERY.

FRANK and I were late for breakfast as usual next morning, but much to our delight we found that we had beaten Nora, who appeared just after we had seated ourselves.

"Aha! Who's a lazybones now?" said Frank pointedly, with an air of self-satisfied virtue.

"Isn't that a case of the 'kettle and the pot'?" suggested Mrs. Naismith, who had finished her own breakfast, but was pouring out our tea. "Never mind him, Nora. I hope you had a good rest after yesterday's excitement."

"Yes, mother dear, I slept like a top," she answered, with a scornful glance at her jeering brother.

"That is good. Do you think you would like to go to a tea party this afternoon?"

"A tea party? Rather. Where is it? At Clifden?"

"Yes. Your father brought an invitation from Colonel Leighton last night. His housekeeper is to be away for the day, and he asked if you would go over after lunch and give him his tea. So you will have the kitchen all to yourself."

"How jolly!" cried Nora, clapping her hands. "May I bake scones? Colonel Leighton is a dear! I must take the locket and show it to him."

"Where is father?" asked Frank.

"He went off early this morning, as he had a large number of visits to pay.—Now, Humphrey, aren't you going to open that interesting-looking parcel?"

"I was going to ask Nora to open it," I said. "My aunt says in her letter that she is sending the present I wrote about, and this is it."

Nora took the parcel I handed her, and cutting the string unfolded the paper.

"Oh, what a jolly collar!" she exclaimed, holding it out to show Mrs. Naismith, "and it has got Bouncer's name on it. Thank you ever so much, Humphrey, for such a nice present."

"It is a beauty," said Mrs. Naismith, examining it. "I hope you didn't spend all your pocket-money in buying it, Humphrey. Bouncer will be quite a swell with this on."

“Good old Bouncer,” said Frank; “let’s go and show him his new dress.”

The retriever received us with boisterous welcome, but seemed quite indifferent to his new collar, and it was only by our united efforts that we managed to fasten it on his neck.

“I think he is very ungrateful,” said Nora indignantly, when the operation was at length safely accomplished. “He might at least have given you a paw. Look! He is rolling himself in the mud.—Bouncer, come here, sir!”

As a punishment for his rude behaviour his stern mistress insisted on chaining the poor dog up again and leaving him to repent of his misdeeds while we indulged in a game of cricket. As usual, Frank won, and as usual Nora, who captained our side, protested.

“Your leg was right in front, Frank. You know it was.”

“But I hit the ball with my bat first. That’s not l.b.w.”

“Of course it is.—Isn’t it, Humphrey?”

Luckily Mrs. Naismith’s appearance on the scene put an end to what threatened to become a quarrel, and Nora was carried off to make herself tidy for the

tea party, while Frank and I finished the game by ourselves.

After lunch we escorted Nora to the avenue gate, to give her a "send off," as Frank expressed it, and to tell the truth we both secretly wished we were going with her.

"Remember me to the colonel, and tell him I think it is shabby not to ask the lot of us to his cooky shine. What's that you've got in your hand?—a present for Win Kee?"

"Rather not. It's the locket and chain to show to Colonel Leighton. I forgot about Win Kee. I hope he is away for the day too."

"Not a bit of him. He'll be there. The colonel can't do without him. You and he will have a jolly time together."

Nora had already opened the gate and stepped into the road, but at Frank's teasing remarks she paused, irresolute. "Bother Win Kee, I do dislike him," she said, "and I know he hates me. I wish you boys were coming."

"Never mind Win Kee," I said reassuringly; "he won't make himself unpleasant when Colonel Leighton is there."

"No, I don't suppose he will. Well, I must be

off. Good-bye," and she waved her hand in a parting salute.

We watched the little pink figure pass through the garden in front of Cliffden and disappear into the doorway, and sauntered back to the house.

"I believe Nora dreams about Win Kee," laughed Frank; "she thinks he will kidnap her or something."

Mrs. Naismith met us at the door dressed for visiting.

"Well, boys," she said, buttoning her gloves, "I am afraid you will be alone for tea this afternoon. You must play the host, Frank, and see that Humphrey gets all he wants."

"All right. That will be a lark. Where are you going, mother?"

"I promised to meet your father at the Wentworths' and drive home with him, but there are one or two visits I must pay on the road. We may be late, but Nora will be back before six."

Left to ourselves, we found the time hang rather heavily on our hands, and at Jane's suggestion we had our tea an hour earlier than usual. Frank acted the host after his own peculiar manner, piling the bread on my plate and emptying the jam dish over

it. No protests on my part were of any avail, and between us we spilt most of the tea and sugar over the clean cloth before Jane chased us out of the dining-room.

“What a beastly long afternoon!” said Frank as we lolled about the drawing-room. “What on earth shall we do?”

“Suppose we go and hunt up Inspector Melvin,” I suggested.

“We’ve nothing new to tell him,” objected Frank. “Crickey!” he exclaimed after a moment’s pause, “I know what I’ll do. I’ll write up the diary of the Sherlock Holmes Society.”

Straightway he seated himself at Mrs. Naismith’s desk, and rummaging through the drawers discovered some notepaper, which, along with his fingers, he speedily contrived to cover with ink. Nor would he answer any of my remarks, so engrossed was he in his work, and at last I left him and wandered out into the garden. My mind was vaguely uneasy about Nora; Frank’s joking references to Win Kee had somehow stirred all my latent dislike to the man. I began to wish that Inspector Melvin would leave his investigations at Fareham Castle for a bit and turn his attention to Cliffden. Was it possible

that he had any suspicions about the Chinaman? He had given no hint of the direction of his thoughts, and certainly there was little evidence of any kind against Win Kee. If only I could procure definite proof to lay before the detective.

As these thoughts passed through my mind I stumbled against a stone, and only recovered my balance with an effort. Looking down to see the cause of the mishap, I discovered that, all unwittingly, I had strayed to the very spot where Poacher, the rabbit, had been run to earth a few days previously, and that, but for my lucky stumble, I should have put my foot right into the hole.

Cliffden, Colonel Leighton's house, was only about three hundred yards away; and feeling that in a manner I was protecting Nora by my presence, I sat down amongst the heath facing the sea. Idly, as boys will, I took to flinging stones and bits of dried earth down the hole. Something about the peculiar sound they made attracted my attention, and I dropped down another stone larger than the others. "That's rummy," I muttered to myself; "why, it sounds quite hollow down there, like that smuggler's cave we explored."

Rising on to my knees I examined the edge of

the hole, and perceived that if a large boulder were removed the cavity would be considerably enlarged. To effect this I set to work at once, and with such energy as nearly to bring about my undoing, for the boulder having been unloosened by my exertions, a vigorous tug completed the business, and, accompanied by a shower of earth and gravel, the boulder suddenly disappeared. I felt it going, and tried to regain my balance, but too late, and next instant I found myself falling headlong. The drop was not great, and the loosened earth broke the shock; but for a moment or two I lay wondering what had happened, and blinking stupidly at the light overhead.

Picking myself up slowly, I soon found that no bones were broken, and beyond a shaking and a mouthful of soil I was little the worse. I appeared to be in a low, narrow tunnel, but where it led I could not conjecture, as the only light came from the hole through which I had just fallen. My first impulse, to clamber out again as quickly as possible, speedily gave place to a feeling of curiosity and a boyish love of adventure. What strange place was this I had accidentally discovered? I had often read of secret underground passages, but it had never occurred to me that such places really existed.

Suddenly Dr. Naismith's story of the old smuggler's retreat flashed across my mind, and I peered round about me with increasing interest and excitement. Could this really be the very place? What a tale this would be to relate to the Sherlock Holmes Society! but how the president would scoff if I hesitated now!

After all there was nothing to fear except losing my way, and by keeping in touch with one side of the tunnel I could avoid this. "Now for it," I muttered to myself, and turning in the direction of the sea I stepped cautiously forward. Step by step I crept along, my heart beating with excitement. The light from the entrance hole soon disappeared, and pitch darkness fell like a heavy pall. But my mind was now made up, and I pushed on steadily. Something—a rat—scuttled away at my approach, and I started at the sound.

On and on I crept, and I seemed to have been walking for hours, when my left hand, with which I kept in touch with the wall, suddenly groped in empty space. A cross passage at last! This was what I had feared, and prudence told me that retreat was the safer plan. "I don't believe it leads anywhere," I muttered to myself; but even as I paused

irresolute, my eye, peering ahead blindly, caught a tiny streak of light shining through the surrounding gloom.

Daylight at last ! In my relief prudence and discretion were thrown to the winds, and groping my way past the opening I stumbled onwards frantic with excitement. A current of fresh air fanned my cheek, and the light broadened at every step. The walls of the passage widened suddenly, and turning a corner I gave an involuntary exclamation of wonder and surprise ; for opposite me the solid rock was cleft by a narrow vertical slit through which the sunlight was streaming.

At first I was dazzled so much that everything appeared blurred and indistinct, but as my eyes grew more accustomed to the change, I made out that I had emerged into a rocky grotto in the face of the cliff, and far below lay the sparkling blue sea. The upper part of the rock projected over the floor, so that by leaning forward it was possible to look down almost to the base of the cliffs. It gave me a curious dizzy sensation, for all the world as though I were hanging in mid-air ; but the strength of the massive rock gave me confidence, and the sense of insecurity soon passed.

The tide was out, and as I gazed at the scene a puzzled feeling came over me. Surely I had looked down on this panorama before! That rounded flat rock over yonder was our favourite spot for fishing, and the path down to the sea emerged right under my feet. Then suddenly it flashed across me that once before, the day after our arrival, I had peeped over the cliff and looked down on exactly the same spot. It was the morning that Bouncer's queer behaviour had attracted our attention, and we had fancied that we had smelt tobacco smoke. Was it possible that some one had been smoking in this very cave, and could this be the smuggler's cave that Dr. Naismith had spoken about? My heart leapt at the thought, and an unpleasant feeling made me look round quickly at the dark, silent tunnel through which I had come. I remembered the doctor's words about the unpleasant reception likely to be accorded any one who unwittingly stumbled across the smugglers; and though the unknown smoker could hardly be a smuggler, yet he might prove quite as unpleasant.

I drew back from the loophole and glanced round the grotto, a vague feeling of uneasiness growing upon me with the silence. On one side the rock had

been hewn out to make a rough seat, and at the foot of this my eye fell on several white objects lying on the ground. I stooped and picked one up. Matches again—the same white wax vestas as I had found in the doctor's study and in the turret at Fareham Castle. After all, perhaps the clue Inspector Melvin wanted was to be found in the grotto. The idea made me cast another searching glance around, but in vain, and it must have been instinct that caused me to run my hand along the back of the stone ledge, which was in darkness. My fingers closed over a folded piece of paper, which I drew out to the light. The writing was in the same sprawling hand as in the note which the detective had deemed important, and as I plodded slowly through the queerly expressed scrawl, the conviction was forced upon me that I held in my hand at last definite proof against some one. Who that some one might be it was Inspector Melvin's business to find out, but here were clear instructions as to the sum of money drawn by Dr. Naismith from the bank. The sooner this paper was in the detective's hands the better.

Trembling with excitement I thrust the paper into my pocket, and turned to re-enter the tunnel. Even as I did so a sound caught my ear—a sound which

made my heart leap and then stand still. From far away the noise of some one stumbling in the darkness reverberated down the silent passage, and I realized that the owner of the letter was approaching! I was caught like a rat in a trap! My first impulse was to squeeze through the aperture on to the face of the cliff, but a glance showed this to be impossible. What was to be done? To stand where I was in the lighted grotto meant instant detection and capture. My only chance lay in the darkness of the tunnel, and like a flash the remembrance of the cross passage occurred to me. Could I but reach it in time, escape was possible.

Guided by the wall of rock I crept along, pausing every now and then as the sounds indicated the nearer approach of the unknown burglar. It was horrible to feel that somewhere in that dense darkness an enemy was drawing closer, and it was with difficulty that I refrained from crying out in nervous terror. The distance seemed to have lengthened out immeasurably, and I was about to abandon myself to despair when suddenly the goal was reached. At the same instant I dropped to the floor, crouching in terror, for close beside me a loud oath broke the stillness, and I felt that the end was come. Heavy

breathing and the scuffling of footsteps indicated the close proximity of my unwelcome neighbour; but as I waited the noise receded, and I held my breath in suspense. A pause, and then the sound of heavy boots ascending stone steps, and the truth flashed across me. We had both been making for the cross passage! A moment sooner and I should have been discovered! The sound of a match being struck echoed in the narrow space, and the faint glimmer of light threw into relief the side passage with its damp, glistening walls. The grating of a rusty bolt being withdrawn followed, and the sound of a ponderous weight being lifted.

I pulled myself on to my feet, and stood ready to dart forward on my way, when there came a gruff exclamation of surprise followed by a scream of terror, cut short by the fall of a trapdoor. What had happened? Where was I? My blood seemed to freeze in my veins, for in that piteous cry for help I recognized Nora's voice!

In the dead stillness that succeeded I stood for an instant as though petrified; then with a loud shout I dashed blindly down the side passage and stumbled against the stone steps. Up these I bounded, only to meet a solid roof of rock,

against which I beat my fists in vain. Against my puny strength the massive stone trapdoor was immovable. Again and again I shouted, but there was no response.

Baffled and raging, hardly conscious of the act, I stumbled down the steps and gained the main tunnel. Only one thought possessed me—to reach the exit and rouse the neighbourhood. Nora was in the clutches of the burglar! That was all that mattered. The rest could wait. What it all signified I did not pause to consider. Nora must be rescued immediately at all costs.

Should I never reach the exit? Stumbling, falling, bruised and battered, I rushed headlong down through the darkness. On and on I went, falling prostrate at last as my foot slipped on some loose stones. Slowly I picked myself up, with the growing conviction that I had lost my way. Lost, and Nora alone with the man I felt sure was the burglar!

I turned to retrace my steps, when a shower of loose earth fell on my head. I looked up mechanically, and next instant with a wild spring I had thrust my hand through the hole by which I had entered, and was dragging myself through. Some

one—probably the burglar—had stuffed a clod of earth into the opening, and only by the luckiest accident had I discovered it. Torn and bleeding I hoisted myself through, and fell panting and exhausted amongst the gorse.

CHAPTER X.

THE END OF WIN KEE.

“**H**UMPHREY VERNEY!” exclaimed a voice close by. “Where in all the world have you come from?”

For a moment I lay too dazed and breathless to reply; then picking myself up slowly I found Inspector Melvin standing before me.

“Where on earth have you been?” he repeated, gazing inquiringly from me to the hole in the ground. “You look as if you had been down a coal mine. Your hands are all scratched and bleeding too. Anything wrong, eh?”

What with the excitement and the earth I had swallowed, I could only splutter something about “Nora” and “burglar,” pointing vaguely in the direction of Cliffden; but my companion’s keen mind at once grasped the fact that there was something badly amiss, and he prepared to take instant action.

"Steady," he said quickly, pocketing his pipe. "Wait till you've got your breath, and then tell me the whole story. Now."

"The tunnel," I jerked out. "I got into it, and went—a long way—to the cliffs. The burglar nearly caught me. He went up a stone stair, and—Nora screamed. Save her!"

An eager light flashed into the detective's eyes, and he gripped my arm.

"Do you mean to tell me that is an underground passage you have just come out of?"

"Yes. It leads to a cave high up in the cliffs. I found this letter there."

He took the piece of paper I held out, and glanced hastily at the mysterious message.

"John Hare!" he exclaimed suddenly. "I thought the figure was familiar somehow. We must act at once."

"Yes, yes, come on," I cried, taking a step forward.

"One minute," he replied, speaking rapidly. "The bird has flown. Ten minutes ago he came out of the house and hurried off towards the village. He may have companions. If you will run and warn Bobby—"

"I won't," I cried impatiently, breaking from my companion's grasp. "I must find Nora."

"Come on, then," was the only comment, and we set off running towards Cliffden.

Our goal was no great distance away, and in spite of the difficult going we soon reached the garden and scrambled through the hedge.

Here we called a halt to make a survey of our surroundings, but as there was no sign of any movement in the house we moved forward again.

Creeping round behind some rose bushes, we gained the front of the building, and made a dash for the door. Once inside, the detective signed to me to be silent, and for several minutes we stood motionless, listening for the slightest sound. Once my companion bent forward his head, and I thought that his trained ear had detected some slight movement.

"I've a mind to give a call," he said, turning to me at last. "Be ready. Hullo, there!"

At the sound of his voice I braced myself ready to dash forward on the instant, expecting to hear an answering cry from Nora. But none came. The echoes reverberated down the hall and up the stairway and then died away. Silence fell again, and

I could hear my heart beating loudly as excitement grew with the fleeting seconds.

"That is strange," muttered the inspector with a puzzled look. "Come, we had better make a search at once."

"You don't think—" I began, a sudden fear coming over me at his words.

"No, no," he interrupted hastily; "you will find your little friend all right, only— Ha! did you hear anything?"

He paused with his hand on the door of the first room on the right, his head craned forward, an alert look on his face. In the tense silence which followed, the ticking of the great clock at the other end of the hall was distinctly audible. Tick, tock, tick, tock, swung the pendulum with its monotonous rhythm, but not another sound broke the stillness. The strain was beginning to tell on my nerves; my heart was thumping as if it had just finished running a race.

"I heard something," whispered my companion, "but can't locate the sound. Stand clear; I'm going in here."

Turning the handle noiselessly as he spoke, he flung the door open, springing to the side with a

quick movement. But his precautions were unnecessary; the room was empty. After a swift glance round the inspector was about to retire, when his eye lighted on something, and he gave a start.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed, "what does this mean?"

Stepping forward I followed the direction of his gaze, and perceived an overturned vase of flowers lying on the floor. The water had trickled over the carpet, and could not have been long spilt, for it lay in a small pool as though there had been no time for it to sink into the soft pile.

"Where can the colonel be?" muttered the inspector. "I don't half like the look of this."

He took a step forward towards the vase, but even as he did so I gripped his arm.

"Look," I cried, "under that curtain. There's a man's foot sticking out!"

I felt the muscles under my grasp grow hard and rigid as my companion took in the situation, and next instant something bright flashed in his hand. Even in that moment of intense excitement I realized that here, at least, Frank was right. Inspector Melvin did carry a revolver. Gathering himself together, with a sudden movement he flung himself towards the curtain, and dashing it aside levelled his weapon.

“Don’t move, or— Ah!”

He stopped short with a sudden quick intaking of his breath, and then as he stepped aside I saw that a man lay huddled in an armchair, with his head fallen forward on his breast.

“The colonel! It must be Colonel Leighton,” exclaimed the detective, and with dexterous fingers he loosened the collar and laid his hand over the heart of the silent figure.

“Is he—is he dead?” I whispered in an awed voice, gazing with horror at the tragic scene.

“No; the heart still beats, though feebly. He is only unconscious. I can’t make it out; it must be shock. There is no sign of violence, and yet— Look! What is that he has got in his hand?”

“A chain—Nora’s gold chain. Oh, where can she be?”

“That is what we must find out—and at once. We can do nothing here for the present. There is something about this I don’t understand. Come, let’s search the house.”

He turned to leave the room, the revolver still in his hand; but as he reached the door there came a low muffled cry that sent my heart into my mouth.

“There it is again,” said the detective, “only louder this time. Where does it come from?”

“Downstairs,” I answered, trembling. “It sounded from just underneath us.”

Without another word the detective dashed into the hall, and I followed him. There was no attempt at concealment now, and we shouted as we ran. Two rooms which we entered proved to be empty, but as we flung open a third door, revealing a descending flight of stone stairs, the muffled cry came wailing up to us again.

“You are right—it is downstairs,” ejaculated my companion, tearing down the stone steps.

Below, the light was dim and uncertain; but guided by a renewal of the cry, we sped down the narrow passage and burst open a door on the left.

“Nora!”

With a bound I was across the room. She was lying on the floor by the fireplace, her arms and legs tightly tied and a napkin fastened over her mouth. Her eyes, wild with terror and pain, seemed starting from her head, and the piteous look on her white face went to my heart as I knelt by her side. In a trice the cords which bound her were cut, and the gag removed from her mouth. Stiff and cramped

by lying on the stone floor, Nora was hardly able to move a muscle; but we helped her up on to a chair, and then she burst out into hysterical weeping.

"That will do her a lot of good," said the inspector, while I stood by looking on in affright. "Once she has had a good cry she will feel relieved, and we must take her home at once. The sooner we are on the track of that scoundrel the better."

"But the colonel?" I objected.

"I shall see to him before we go. Ah! I thought so. Do you see that press over yonder? I expect that is where your friend the burglar entered from the tunnel. I'll just make sure."

He stepped into the press, and I heard him groping about as if feeling for something, and next moment he gave a cry of triumph.

"I've got it," he exclaimed. "A child could work the stone from this side. Look here."

I heard him pull up what sounded like a trapdoor, and, my curiosity excited, I was about to follow and find out what he was after, when Nora looked up.

"Humphrey, don't leave me. Stay with me," she cried in piteous accents; and seizing my hand in hers, she clung to me convulsively while her sobs broke out afresh.

"That's the entrance right enough, just as I expected," said the detective with satisfaction, coming back into the kitchen; and then turning to Nora he continued more gently, "Come along, missy; we'll take you home to your mother."

"Oh yes, take me home," sobbed Nora; and with some difficulty we helped her up the stairs, for she was still very stiff and trembled violently.

When we came opposite the drawing-room door the detective signed to me to go on while he slipped into the room. Luckily Nora was too much agitated to remember about the colonel, and the inspector soon rejoined us. He offered to carry Nora, being anxious to hurry as fast as possible; but this she wouldn't listen to, and clung to me all the closer. How that short distance to Ivy Cottage was accomplished I do not remember. I have a confused recollection of listening to incoherent outbursts from Nora about "burglars" and "Win Kee," a distinct impression of the astonishment on the faces of two tramps on the road, and then we were in the house, and Frank was pouring out a torrent of excited queries, while Martha, the cook, was attending to Nora and soothing her on her motherly bosom.

"Now, then," said the inspector sharply, cutting

short Frank's stream of questions, "there is plenty to do and little time to waste. Master Frank, you must go off on your bicycle at once and find your father. Tell him that your sister is all right, but that Colonel Leighton is lying unconscious in his own house."

"But, but—" began Frank.

"Off you go," repeated the inspector. "You'll hear all about it afterwards. Remember that the colonel's life is hanging in the balance."

Then as Frank reluctantly obeyed his commands he turned to me.

"I must be off. Now listen. I am going to enter the underground tunnel where you came out and follow it inland. I am almost sure that it will lead to Fareham Castle, whence the burglar is certain to have made his way."

"Fareham Castle!" I exclaimed.

"Yes. Now I *know* there must be a secret entrance to this tunnel from the turret old Peter showed you in the castle, though as yet I have been unable to find it. Run down and get Bobby, the policeman, to go there immediately—just as fast as he can—and we have our man in a trap. Do you understand?"

"Yes; I'll go at once, if—" I looked towards Nora, who was still sobbing in the cook's arms.

"Never mind her; she's all right now. Be sure and get Bobby to hurry. If it wasn't such a dangerous job, I'd ask you— Well, get Bobby to *hurry*. Mind, I trust you. Now I'm off."

He slipped out of the room, and a moment later I followed him. I realized that the utmost speed was necessary on our part to ensure the success of his plan, and that everything depended on reaching the turret in time. Bobby was slow and ponderous, and the burglar, warned by the approach of the detective along the tunnel, might make his escape by the turret before the trap was closed. That the game was a dangerous one I recognized clearly even without the inspector's warning; but after all, why shouldn't I have a hand in the fun? Bobby might be late, but a mile was my favourite distance, and with a little luck—why, of course, there was Bouncer! It took only a few seconds to release the young retriever, and together we rushed off down to the village. We were in luck's way. Bobby was just sitting down to tea with his wife when we burst into the room, and he looked up with a mild air of surprise on his genial countenance.

"Why, Master Humphrey, whatever have you been doing? Your face is all—"

"Never mind that just now, Bobby; come away with me at once, please."

"Indeed, and he'll do no such thing, begging your pardon," replied his wife sharply. "He's just this moment in, and—"

"Well, well, Maria," said Bobby soothingly, "let me hear what the young gentleman wants. Perhaps—"

"It's the detective," I blurted out impatiently. "He told me to say you were to hurry just as fast as possible and come with me."

"Ah! the detective." Bobby's face changed at the name, and rising he picked up his helmet.—"I must go, Maria. Duty first, tea afterwards."

He gave his wife a resounding kiss, and followed me out of the room.

"The keys," I said—"bring the keys of the castle."

He picked up a huge bunch, and we set off on our errand. In a few hasty words I described to my companion what was expected of us, and he responded gallantly to the call. When hardly half of the distance had been covered, however, his breath

began to fail, and he was forced to halt and mop his perspiring brow. Gazing anxiously into his face, I realized that no more could be expected from one of his build, and on the instant my resolution was taken.

"Come on as fast as you can, Bobby; I'll go ahead," and with a call to Bouncer I set off running at full speed.

Melvin's words kept ringing in my brain, "I trust you," and the words fitted themselves into the swing of my stride. He would not find his trust misplaced if I could help it, but what was about to happen I could not imagine. Events had moved so rapidly that my thoughts were all in a whirl, and the true significance of all that had occurred had not yet struck me. At the time I had been too much taken up with Nora's plight to notice anything else, but now her remarks about Win Kee came back to my mind and set me wondering. What was it she had kept repeating about him, and how was it we had not come across him? Melvin had said something about a man leaving Cliffden and making for the village, but I had understood him to refer to the burglar.

My arrival at the lodge gates cut short the train of thought, but soon I had scaled the low wall, helped

Bouncer over, and was speeding up the avenue. Was I in time? All seemed quiet as I pulled up under the shadow of the castle and gazed up at the turret. What was to be done next? Access must be gained to the secret entrance, but how? Bobby had the keys, and he was far behind. Stay; where had Frank entered? Surely I could follow. My eye ran along the lower basement, and fell on a little square window some six feet from the ground. This must be the place. Calling Bouncer to me, I lifted him up, struggling and kicking, and endeavoured to thrust him in. Twice he wriggled out of my grasp and fell backwards, but a third attempt proved more successful. The window swung inward, and the retriever disappeared with a short yelp. Retreating a few paces I took a running leap at the wall, and secured a good grip of the window-sill. Hauling myself up, I squeezed through somehow, and fell in a heap on the top of Bouncer, who was waiting on the other side. We were in. So far so good. Picking myself up, I discovered that, as Frank had said, we were in the passage leading from the gun-room, and in a few moments I had groped my way to the haunted turret.

So far the excitement of the chase had buoyed up

my courage, but the deathly stillness of the deserted castle and the knowledge of the unseen presence of desperate criminals close at hand sent a cold chill down my back. Hastily pulling myself together, I started to make a rapid search round the bare room, glad of something to keep my mind occupied. But, as on the day of our previous visit, my efforts were in vain; not a sign could I discover of any secret entrance or trapdoor. As before, I came upon marks of candle grease, but the solid stone floor and walls seemed to mock my attempts at unravelling their secret, and at length I desisted. A feeling of profound thankfulness for Bouncer's presence came over me, and calling him to my side I took up my position in the doorway, so that the whole of the bare, empty room was visible. Was it possible, as the detective had said, that there was a secret entrance leading thence to the underground passage I had discovered? It seemed incredible, and yet— Suddenly my heart leapt violently as a muffled sound came to my ears— a pistol shot! Dull and indistinct, there was no mistaking the report. Again it rang out, and then silence succeeded. In a tremble of excitement I waited for what would happen next, and the loud clang of an iron gate made me start nervously.

Bobby was at hand! Already he was coming up the avenue, and the knowledge gave me confidence. But even as I heaved a sigh of relief the retriever stirred and growled, and I became conscious of a faint echo, which seemed to reach me through the ground. Bobby would be too late after all, and I must play my part alone.

Crouching down, with one hand over Bouncer's muzzle, I waited with beating heart. The suspense was sickening. If only I knew the point to guard! The seconds passed, and the ominous sounds drew nearer. Surely Bobby must be close at hand. I felt the retriever grow tense and rigid under my hand, and my jaw dropped as my gaze lighted on the wall opposite. Slowly, noiselessly, moved by some unseen agency, one of the great slabs of stone revolved backwards out of sight, and a man's hand appeared at the aperture. As he stretched forth an arm to draw himself through, a slight movement on my part caused him to look up, and—I found myself face to face with Chew Win Kee! For a moment we stared in silence, both too surprised to utter a sound, and then with a growl Bouncer sprang forward at his enemy. With a quick movement Win Kee drew back as though to retire, but a loud shout and the

noise of a desperate struggle going on below warned him that his retreat was cut off. Quick as lightning he turned again, his evil face aglow with hate and passion.

"Call off the dog, you young fool," he snarled, "or—"

His threat was cut short by a furious attack from Bouncer, who, hair on end, leapt at his throat. Taken at a disadvantage, Win Kee could do little more than guard himself, but I realized that once he gained a footing in the turret we should speedily be overpowered. Even as I looked a long, cruel knife flashed in his right hand, while he steadied himself for a deadly blow. Time was on our side, but Bouncer was quite out of control, and hurled himself recklessly on his human foe. A quick thrust, a yelp of pain, and he was flung back, bleeding from an ugly wound. But Win Kee had overreached himself. With a shout of, "Bobby, help!" I seized his outstretched hand, and endeavoured to wrest the dripping knife. For an instant his advance was stayed, but a sudden jerk threw me off my feet, and a moment later he had crawled through the wall, and was bending over me, a savage gleam in his cruel eyes.

"Curse you, I've got you at last!" he hissed, and wrenching his arm free he prepared to strike.

A rush, the sound of a heavy blow, and then for a space a wild struggle seemed to be taking place above my prostrate body. I had a confused knowledge of whirling arms and legs, threats and curses resounded in my ears, and Bouncer's angry growl added to the din. The scuffling gradually ceased, and only the heavy breathing of spent men broke the stillness of the lonely turret. A heavy weight was lifted off my chest, and Bobby's red, perspiring face loomed distinct out of the past confusion.

"You're not hurt, Master Humphrey?" he panted anxiously.

"No," I replied doubtfully, struggling to my feet, "I'm all right. But did you catch Win Kee?"

"The colonel's Chinaman? I never saw him," returned the policeman. "This here fellow was handful enough."

He pointed to a figure lying prone and handcuffed on the floor.

"But that's Win Kee," I cried excitedly. "It was he who hurt Bouncer and was going to stab me."

Bobby gazed at me for a moment, as though fear-

ing that my wits were wandering ; then stooping, he gazed into the prisoner's face.

"I do believe you're right," he said slowly at last. "But where's his pigtail, and how—"

"I don't know. I never thought of that. Whenever his face appeared I recognized him, and so did Bouncer.—Bouncer, good dog, are you badly hurt?" I broke off as the retriever came up to me.

"There's little wrong with him," said Bobby confidently—"only a scratch in the shoulder. The knife must have glanced off his collar. But Win Kee, to think of that now!"

Further speculation was cut short by a hail from somewhere below, which startled us both considerably.

"The inspector," I cried, pointing to the secret entrance. "He's down there. I heard pistol shots. He wants help."

"Bobby, Humphrey, ahoy!"

"Coming!" I shouted, and with Bouncer at my heels I crawled through the gap in the wall.

CHAPTER XI.

TRIUMPH OF THE SECRET SOCIETY.

“TAKE care how you come down,” called the detective from somewhere below; “there seems to be only a ladder.”

The warning came just in time to prevent me going down with a run head first. Backing out again, I thrust my feet in first, to Bobby’s evident astonishment.

“It’s a ladder,” I explained; “you’d better try this way too.”

“I’m not going to try at all,” was Bobby’s reply; “this ’ere fellow’s coming to his senses again, and I’m not going to let him give us the slip.”

Wriggling into the cavity, I let my feet over the edge of the hole, and soon felt the rungs of the ladder. Gripping the sides, I commenced to descend cautiously, leaving Bouncer whining up above. A long, dark journey it seemed, but at last

my feet touched solid ground again, and a minute later I found myself standing in what appeared to be a long, gloomy vault. The only light came from the detective's bull's-eye lantern, and the brilliant streak flashing from its reflector served only to make the surrounding darkness seem more intense. The detective himself was standing by the side of a clumsy wooden table, bending over a heap of gold and silver coins which glittered in the rays of the lantern.

"Here you are," he observed, looking up with obvious relief. "I was wondering how I was to get my prisoner safely up the ladder."

"Your prisoner?" I asked, gazing round blankly.

"He's in the corner over there handcuffed," replied the other. "But did you and Bobby manage to secure John Hare? He's the chap I really want—the leader of the gang."

"Oh, I—I'm sorry," I began, "but—"

"You let him go?"

"No; we never saw him."

"Never saw him! Why, I chased him up the ladder myself, after he'd fired twice at me. There's his revolver lying there yet; he dropped it in his hurry."

"We never saw him," I repeated; "we caught only one man—Win Kee."

"Win Kee!" shouted the detective; and then, much to my surprise, he thumped me on the back and broke into a fit of laughter.

"Forgive me, Watson," he said at last, "but this is too rich. I thought you would have twigged by this time. You've got the very man I want: Win Kee *is* John Hare."

I stared at him, speechless, not sure whether he was making fun of me or not. All my previous suspicions of the Chinaman came back to me in a flash. I remembered now what had escaped me in the excitement of the moment—how the fellow had cursed me in English for barring his escape, and how both Bobby and I had marvelled at the want of the pigtail afterwards.

"Yes, one and the same," reiterated the detective. "He's a clever scoundrel, is John Hare, and his disguise as a Chinaman was a master-stroke. He's been out in the East, you see, and picked up the lingo and style a bit, and his dark, swarthy face lent itself to the make-up."

"But how did he become Colonel Leighton's servant?" I asked.

"Ah, that I don't know; some clever trick, no doubt. When the colonel came home, invalided, John Hare may have heard that a Chinese servant was advertised for to look after him. He was badly wanted by the police himself at that time, and so—Win Kee appeared and John Hare disappeared."

"But what has he been doing here?" I asked again. "I don't understand."

"That's no wonder. Nobody did, and it's only by the help of the Sherlock Holmes Society that I found out myself. See here," he continued, picking up the lantern and throwing its light on a furnace in a far corner of the cellar: "that's where Win Kee and his friends melt metal, and these are their moulds, and that's how they turn out the false coins. Here are plenty of the finished articles."

"Coiners!" I understood what the mystery of the ghosts meant now, and the discovery cleared away much that had been puzzling before.

"Yes, coiners—and more: they issue false bank-notes also, as Dr. Naismith has cause to know. These are some of the implements they use for that purpose, over there. But come now; I must get my man upstairs and relieve Bobby. Hold that sack—so."

He shuffled in the gold and silver coins, closed

the mouth of the sack, which he laid on the table, and turned to stoop over an object lying on the floor behind him.

“Stand up!” he said roughly.

Slowly and with difficulty a figure rose from the ground, and I knew this must be the prisoner which the detective had spoken about.

“Turn the lantern on him, Watson, while I search him.”

As the light fell on the man’s countenance an exclamation of horror escaped from my lips and a feeling of sickness came over me. Under the fierce rays of the lantern the poor fellow’s face, bathed in blood, seemed to leap out of the darkness like some horrid nightmare.

“Steady!” cried my companion quickly, as the light wavered in my trembling grasp; “there’s nothing to be frightened of.”

“But he’s hurt; his face is covered with blood!”

“Pooh! it’s only a mere scratch,” was the contemptuous reply, while the man himself grinned at my anxious tones. “It was a case of cracking his head or losing my life, and I got my blow in first—that’s all.”

The prisoner muttered something under his breath

which sounded like an oath, and if looks could have killed, his captor would have stood a poor chance of his life at that moment.

"He and his two pals set on me as I came out of the tunnel at the other end of the room there," explained the detective, "and if I hadn't taken them by surprise I shouldn't be telling you the tale now. One of them bolted back the way I came, but we should get him to-morrow. The others are safe, as you know. They must have hoped to get away with the swag during the night, or they would hardly have waited so long with Jack Melvin on their track. Feeling better? That's right; keep the light steady."

Stepping to the prisoner's side, he passed his hands rapidly over the fellow's clothes, and with a quick movement jerked a long, ugly-looking knife from some secret pocket.

"There," he said, stepping back with a grin, "you see what we had to expect. Now, I'll just warn Bobby that this beauty is coming, and then we can send him up."

Going to the foot of the ladder, he hailed the man above: "Hullo, Bobby, I'm sending up my prisoner. Put the darbies on him at once, and if he offers any resistance use your baton. Are you ready?"

A muffled reply came from the turret overhead, and Melvin called to his prisoner to come forward, at the same time telling me to keep the light on him. There was a sharp metallic click, and the handcuffs were removed. My gaze was fixed on the prisoner's gruesome face, and I saw a quick gleam in his shifty eyes. Before there was time to warn the detective, however, the latter showed that he too had marked the sudden change.

"None of that, now," he ordered sternly; "I have you covered, and will fire if you move a finger. Up you go!"

With a muttered curse the man stooped, and next second his steps rung on the iron ladder.

"That's all right," said the detective, with a sigh of relief; "I didn't see how I was to get him up that ladder by myself. Once Bobby has him you go next, and I'll follow with this sack. By-the-bye, I haven't thanked you yet for turning up so promptly. How did you manage?"

I explained rapidly what had occurred, and he shook me warmly by the hand.

"That idea of yours about the dog was capital. By Jove, it must have been a near shave! You are a well-plucked youngster, and I shan't forget how

you've helped me. There's Bobby calling. Up with you."

Nothing loath, I hastened to obey, and a few minutes later emerged safely into the turret, where Bobby and Bouncer stood guard over their prisoners. The detective followed with some difficulty, bringing the precious sack with him, and as soon as his glance fell on Win Kee he gave vent to a satisfied chuckle.

"Aha, we've lagged you at last, John! It's a clever game you've been playing down here, but the end's come, and you and your pals will have to pay the cost."

Win Kee, who had been sitting in a corner of the turret, his head resting on his manacled hands, looked up with a sullen scowl, and was about to speak, when Melvin forestalled him.

"Hold on," he said, slowly and deliberately; "it is my duty to warn you that anything you say may be used in evidence against you."

"Garn!" replied Win Kee contemptuously. "You've got all our tools and swag. That's evidence enough."

"Maybe," returned the detective gravely. "But besides all that and the attempt on my life you may be charged with causing the death of old Peter."

Win Kee's truculent air changed suddenly, and a

sickly pallor overspread his swarthy face. Before he could utter a word, however, the other prisoner turned on him with an oath.

"Curse you!" he snarled savagely; "you've let us in for a fine business. You swore you hadn't laid a finger on the old man."

"And I swore true," returned the other sullenly; "I never touched the meddling old fool. He just dropped down in a kind of fit when I came out of this turret one night. That's all I know about it, so help me."

"We'll see about that later on," said the detective, picking up the sack.—"Now, constable, remove your prisoners to the lock-up, and be sure they don't escape. I haven't time to examine the mechanism of this secret passage, so we must leave it open."

With a gruff "Come on, now," Bobby grasped a prisoner in each hand and hustled them off. The detective followed with his burden, and I brought up the rear with Bouncer. As we were locking the outer door I took the opportunity of asking my companion if he really suspected John Hare of murdering old Peter.

"Hardly," was his reply; "but I felt sure there was something behind it all. My theory turns out

to be true, for it is quite correct that Peter's last words about the 'key' referred to his meeting with Win *Kee*. John Hare's story is true, I think. But hurry up; I want to keep close to Bobby in case he needs assistance."

When outside the gates of the castle grounds, I felt a great longing to run ahead and report my exciting adventures to those at Ivy Cottage. I recollected, too, the plight in which we had left Nora and the colonel, and was anxious to know the doctor's verdict upon the latter. Seeing my impatience, Inspector Melvin anticipated my desire.

"There's no need for you to wait for us," he said kindly; "you must want to get home and tell all that's happened. Cut along, and don't forget to look after Bouncer's wound. He is a fine dog, and I owe him a lot. Tell Dr. Naismith I'll be round to see him to-morrow morning."

With a parting nod and a whistle to Bouncer I sped past Bobby and his shuffling charges, and soon left the little group behind. The light was beginning to fail. Now that the intense excitement was passing off, I began to feel very tired and hungry. Not troubling to go round by the village, I had taken a short cut across the heath; but long before

Ivy Cottage was reached my four-footed companion and I had dropped into a walk. The lamps were just being lit as we reached the house, and I could see three figures standing in the hall. Mrs. Naismith and Frank appeared to be listening to the doctor, who had evidently just arrived, for, bag in hand, he was in the act of hanging up his hat. Mrs. Naismith's face wore an expression of mingled astonishment and trouble at her husband's words.

"How extraordinary!" she was saying. "Are you quite sure there is no mistake? It would be cruel to tell Nora if—" Catching sight of me she broke off suddenly. "Why, it's Humphrey at last!" she exclaimed. "My dear boy, where have you been?"

I have a confused remembrance of stumbling forward into the house and seeing Dr. Naismith spring towards me, but the next moment everything seemed to go round, and the light suddenly disappeared. When I came to myself I was reclining in an easy-chair in the drawing-room, with Mrs. Naismith bending over me, while Frank stood staring at me with a scared expression.

"He's coming round," said the doctor, approaching. "He is just overtired, and will soon be all right.—Drink this, my boy."

I took the glass which he held out, and, whatever it contained, it certainly pulled me together wonderfully.

"That's better; the colour is coming back to your cheeks," remarked Mrs. Naismith. "What a fright you gave us! Where have you been all this time, and what have you been doing? Bouncer is all covered with blood."

My thoughts were still a bit confused, but the sight of Frank brought back the memory of the secret society.

"The ghost—we caught the ghost in the turret," I replied somewhat confusedly, "and he stabbed Bouncer."

"The ghost?" repeated Mrs. Naismith, looking towards her husband. "I'm afraid his mind's wandering," she added in a lower tone.

"Oh no, I'm all right now," I asserted, sitting up. "Bouncer and I got first to the turret, and we caught the ghost, and the detective says it is John Hare."

"John Hare?"

"Yes—Win Kee, you know. They are all the same."

"You caught Win Kee—you and Bouncer!" exclaimed the doctor incredulously. "Where is he

now? The scoundrel should be well punished for the way he treated Nora. By-the-bye, I understand that you helped to rescue her. Do you feel up to satisfying our curiosity?"

Mrs. Naismith interposed, pleading that I needed rest and food; but, heedless of her remonstrance, I launched forth into an account of the afternoon's adventures. Frank could hardly contain his excitement when he heard about the discovery of the secret entrance to the turret, and when I had finished he wanted to rush off at once and explore the place himself.

"Hurrah for the Sherlock Holmes Society!" he shouted wildly. "It was all through us everything was discovered—and Bouncer. He must be made a member."

"Hush!" said Mrs. Naismith. "Remember Nora's asleep, and must not be awakened."

"How is Nora?" I inquired.

"Wonderfully well. She owes her release evidently to you, Humphrey. How can I thank you sufficiently for what you did? As her mother—" She stopped abruptly, and stooping down, kissed me tenderly.

"Yes, we all owe a debt of gratitude to you, Humphrey," said the doctor, shaking my hand

warmly, "especially for your pluck in helping to capture this dangerous ruffian John Hare. Later on Colonel Leighton will no doubt wish to express his gratitude."

"The colonel—I had forgotten about him. Is he very ill?"

"No; I am thankful to say he has recovered—not only his memory, but——"

"Crickey!" interrupted Frank; "will Colonel Leighton be any relation to me?"

"No, of course not," replied his father, laughing.

I gazed from one to the other in perplexity, and seeing my look, Mrs. Naismith came to my rescue.

"You forget that Humphrey is quite in the dark as to your meaning," she said; and then, turning to me, she continued, "You have had a great share in the discoveries of the day, but there is another which has been made during your absence—though we owe it also largely to you. We have found Nora's father."

"Found Nora's father?"

"Yes. Her real name is Leighton; the colonel is her father."

"But—but—what have I got to do with it?" I stammered in bewilderment.

"You found the gold locket," interposed the doctor. "But I'll give you the whole story, which I was just telling my wife when you appeared so dramatically. Frank met us three miles out of the village with a confused account of the doings at Cliffden, and intimated that I was requested to go at once and attend Nora, who was in a state of hysteria, and the colonel, who was dead."

"O father, I didn't say that!" cried Frank indignantly.

"Your information conveyed that impression," replied the doctor, laughing, "and made us hurry home in great anxiety. We found Nora somewhat calmer, and leaving her to her mother, I hurried across to Cliffden, where I found the colonel still lying unconscious in the drawing-room. Procuring assistance, I had him carried upstairs and put to bed, where an examination convinced me that he was suffering from some great mental shock. Remembering my conversation the other day with Professor Jefferson, I awaited with some anxiety for his return to consciousness. The moment he came to his senses I noted a different look in his eyes, and his first words confirmed my impression that his memory had been restored.

“‘My wife—Violet?’ he asked immediately.”

“Poor man!” said Mrs. Naismith in a low voice.

“Yes, it was indeed a sad awakening for him,” went on Dr. Naismith, “and I need not dwell on his poignant grief. Gradually he grew calmer, and anxious to divert his thoughts, I questioned him as to the cause of his sudden illness. Now, this is where Humphrey and the Sherlock Holmes Society come in again.”

“Good old Sherlock Holmes Society!” cried Frank.

“But how—what had we to do with it?” I asked.

“You found the gold locket,” was the reply, “and it turns out to be the solution to the mystery. It seems that Nora took it with her to Cliffden to-day and showed it to the colonel, who in some vague way recognized it. In examining it his fingers must have pressed the centre amethyst and released the spring, revealing a miniature of Mrs. Leighton. The sudden shock must have overcome him, and he remembered no more until he found me sitting by his bedside.”

“But Nora—what about her?”

“I am coming to that. Colonel Leighton asked where his wife and child were buried, and I told

him, adding that the little boy was buried in his wife's arms as they were found.

" 'What little boy?' he asked.

" 'Your son,' I replied, fearing that the shock of hearing about his wife's death had been too much for his mind; but his next words startled me.

" 'I had no son,' he said; 'the baby was a girl.'

"And then little by little it all came out, until there seems hardly a doubt that Nora is really the missing child. The connecting link is the chain and locket with the miniature, and the fact that Nora was washed ashore at the same time and close to the same spot serves to prove that she was on the same vessel. Nora's age corresponds, and, curiously enough, it came to my mind at once about her striking likeness to the portrait of the colonel's ancestress in Fareham Castle."

"The Sherlock Holmes Society again!" said Frank triumphantly.

"But how was it that the colonel's solicitors did not know that the child was a girl?" asked Mrs. Naismith. "And why was the mother found clasping another child?"

"We can only conclude that there must have been some extraordinary error in the cable sent home to

the lawyers," replied her husband. "Colonel Leighton was ordered to China immediately afterwards, and there met with the injury which caused the loss of his memory. Mrs. Leighton being drowned on the voyage home, there was no one to acquaint them with the mistake that had been made. The fact that the poor lady was found clasping the dead body of a little boy seemed quite natural, therefore, and how this occurred can only be surmised. Probably in the darkness, with the panic and confusion, Mrs. Leighton had snatched up the wrong child and been swept overboard at once. Colonel Leighton says that the Chinese *amah* was passionately attached to her charge, and she it was, doubtless, who managed to save Nora's life."

"Poor Colonel Leighton, his loss is terrible enough," said Mrs. Naismith softly, with tears in her eyes. "I cannot grudge Nora to him, though I shall miss her sorely."

"It is indeed a strange story," said the doctor, rising; "but now that he has heard all the news I think Humphrey should go to bed. I must have a look at brave Bouncer's hurt, and then run over to Cliff-den and see that the colonel is all right.—Good-night, Humphrey my boy; you have had an exciting day,

and we are all proud of you. If you are late for breakfast to-morrow, no doubt you will be excused."

In spite of Mrs. Naismith's injunctions that there should be no talking, it was long before Frank and I settled down to sleep that night. Again and again we went over the exciting adventures of the day, and it was well past midnight before our tongues ceased.

In the morning Inspector Melvin called, as he had promised, and brought word that the escaped coiner had been arrested. Frank and I were called into the study, and heard from the detective that Win Kee had confessed everything when he saw that the game was up. Having accidentally discovered the entrance to the smuggler's passage from the Cliffden kitchen, he had explored the tunnel and hit upon the idea of utilizing the vault under the castle for coining purposes. To this end he had invoked Peter's superstitious fears and acted the part of ghost, so that he and his friends should be undisturbed at their work. But for the slip of paper he had dropped at the station, and which I had inadvertently picked up, the detective's suspicion might not have been aroused. On the night of our arrival, having got word that Dr. Naismith had a

certain amount of money in his house, he effected an entrance by means of false keys, having drugged the unsuspecting Bouncer. It was on his return from Ivy Cottage that he first missed the letter, and fearing it had been dropped in or about the house, he had returned to make a search; and it was then that I had observed him.

"So from first to last the credit of the whole affair belongs to the Sherlock Holmes Secret Society," the detective concluded, with a twinkle in his eye, "and I'm very proud to be a member. I hear that other discoveries have been made owing to its investigations, and that Miss Nora has found her father. I hope she will be none the worse of her encounter with the rascal John Hare. There is no fear of him giving further trouble for many years to come. Good-bye, boys; I'll see if I can't manage to send you a memento of your first 'case.'"

The detective was as good as his word, for some days later a box arrived addressed to "The S. H. Society, c/o Dr. Naismith, Ivy Cottage, Peddlington." On being opened, we found a revolver taken from one of the gang, three false sovereigns, a counterfeit five-pound note, and Win Kee's cast-off pigtail. Frank at once started a museum, which in time he hoped

would rival that at Scotland Yard. Nora, who soon forgot her past adventures in the excitement of the news that Colonel Leighton was her long-lost father, flatly refused to allow her precious locket to be deposited along with these interesting relics, and on being threatened by the president, promptly resigned her membership.

"I never want to hunt any more ghosts," she said emphatically. "I've found my own daddy, and that's all I wanted."

Colonel Leighton was most profuse in his thanks to me for the discovery of the locket and Nora's rescue, and when Frank and I returned to Brother-ton at the end of the holidays he tipped us both handsomely.

Through Mrs. Naismith we were informed later that, having heard of the death of Mrs. Leighton, Lord Gresham had become reconciled to his cousin, and was anxious to do everything in his power for the child of the woman he had loved.

"Just fancy," wrote Nora to me in a long letter: "we are going to live at Fareham Castle. I was half frightened at the idea at first; but the secret passage is to be shut up, and Bobby is to come and take old Peter's place at the lodge. Daddy says

that *of course* you are to come to us for your Christmas holidays. He has written to your father about what you did, and offered to use his influence in getting you a commission in the army. How will you like that? Bouncer sends his love. That wretch Poacher has run away again. Perhaps you will find him for me when you come."

The prospect of entering the army sent me wild with delight, and threatened seriously to interfere with my studies.


Frank wrote off at once to Dr. Naismith asking to be allowed to become an officer also, and at the same time took occasion to point out to me how much I owed to him.

"It's all come about through the Sherlock Holmes Society," he observed gravely. "If it hadn't been for that, we should never have discovered anything. I told you we would get rewarded all round."

And to this I was forced to agree.

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